

== KODAK KATE IN A NEW ROLE! ==



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DEADWOOD DICK, JR.'S, CLUTCH.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.



"THAT REVOLVER, STRANGER, MARKS THE DEATH-LINE OF CAPTAIN CRUSHER."

Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Clutch;

OR,

CRUSHING CAPTAIN CRUSHER.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN CRUSHER'S CAUTION.

THE two men faced each other, their right hands resting upon revolvers at their hips.

One was a man of thirty, apparently, with a bold, fearless face, the features well set off by a graceful mustache.

His confronter was perhaps ten years older, with full bearded face, and his left arm was bandaged and in a sling. Both were similarly clad.

Their attire was that of the rough-and-ready denizen of the Western hills, consisting of coarse shirts and trousers, with rough slouch hats and heavy cowhide boots.

High up among the mountain-top peaks, the scene was about as wild a one as can be imagined. Great splinters of rock towered here and there for hundreds of feet, and yawning chasms gaped below.

The spot where the two men stood was about the only level space the eye could find, and this was small, barely large enough to have held a dozen men. One side of it was occupied by the butt of a huge pine, the body of which spanned one of the chasms, supported by a branch of another tree.

Out upon this fallen giant, about at the place where it rested upon the arm of the standing tree, lay a cocked revolver.

The younger of the two men had just come upon the scene.

As a matter of precaution, each man's hand had dropped upon a weapon, neither knowing the intentions of the other.

"Well, stranger, peace or war?" demanded the younger man, in a careless manner, as though he little cared which it was. "We're both primed, I see."

"We'll have it peace, unless you prefer to make it war," was the response, in a tone as bold and careless as that of the first speaker. "Don't know of any reason why we should fight."

"I'm just as well satisfied," rejoined the younger, "and I see you are partly disabled anyhow. But, tell me, what is the meaning of that revolver out there on the tree-trunk?" pointing with his left index as he put the question. "Does it belong to you?"

"That revolver, stranger, marks the death-line of Captain Crusher."

"Captain Crusher? Who is he?"

"One of the worst red-headed outlaws who ever infested the West. It is death to cross this chasm."

"Ho! that is the way of it, eh? Then that cocked weapon is a silent warning to pilgrims to keep off. Well, do you mean to allow it to scare you out, stranger? Do you want to cross?"

"I have tried it once."

"Ah! and that's why your arm is in a sling?"

"You've struck it."

"Tell me about it."

"How do I know but *you* are Captain Crusher?"

"Then you have never seen his face, I take it? Well, I assure you I'm not the gentleman."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Rod Sage, a free rover of these wilds, coming when I please and going when I get ready. Who are you?"

"I am Dick Seller, a tramp prospector on the lookout for a find that will put me on my feet for the remainder of my days."

That is to say, I was, but now I'm looking for revenge."

"Revenge on whom?"

"This Captain Crusher."

"See here, Mr. Seller, you interest me. There is no reason why we should be longer suspicions of each other. Let's sit down here and talk this thing out. Maybe I can be of use to you."

"Use to me?"

"That was what I said. My time is my own, and I wouldn't mind chipping in with you, seeing that you're wounded, if your cause is a worthy one and you are in the right of it. Here, let's sit down on the tree and take it easy. I'm going to trust you, you see."

So saying, the younger man removed his hand from his revolver and sat down.

He was thus giving the other the chance to get the "drop" on him, if he wanted to take advantage of it.

Seller looked at him a moment without speaking, then removed his hand from his own weapon and took his seat on the dead tree as invited, remarking as he did so:

"You laid yourself open that time, pard, which proves you trust me. No reason why I shouldn't trust you. But, how did you know that I wasn't Captain Crusher or one of his imps. Maybe *you* have seen him?"

"No, not so; but, I seldom get fooled in the reading of a face, and I read honesty in yours, Mr. Seller."

"Well, I'll let longer acquaintance be the proof of that. If you are in earnest about offering your help, I'll be glad to take you at your word. It is my life against this outlaw's, now."

"Because of that bullet in your arm, I take it, eh?"

"That's only second in importance. I seek to avenge the death of an only brother, who was my pard for years, and who fell by the hand of this heartless devil, Captain Crusher."

"Ha! If that is the case, your cause is a just one, undoubtedly. But, let me hear your story."

"It is plain and simple, and soon told."

"All the better for that."

"My brother John and I had been wandering these wilds for several years, on the lookout, as I said, for a strike that would fix us out for life, and finally we got down here to the camp of Big Nug."

"I know of the place; there's where I'm heading for myself, indirectly."

"It is short for Big Nugget, you understand. A monster nugget was found there when the camp was first settled, and ever since a couple of hundred men or more have been fooling away their time looking for the twin to it, and that was what brought us down."

"A useless search."

"Yes, that's so; but, then, we didn't really set out to make a find of that sort, but to locate a paying lead that would prove a better thing than the nugget. And in our hunt we followed up the gulches one after another till at last we got into this one over which this tree spans, and there we struck signs that wasn't to be doubted, and we knew there was gold above."

"With the chances that it had already been located, and was being held fast to by this Captain Crusher."

"Another good guess. At any rate, that guess is my own opinion of the matter, now, and it seems to stand proved. If not that, then this outlaw has his stronghold over there and this is the way to it. Well, my brother and I wandered and climbed around among the gulches, trying to find a way to get up over the place where we had discovered the signs, and at last we found ourselves here on this shoulder, and the revolver was there just as you see it now."

"Then the way to this spot isn't generally known?"

"No. You see, it's a couple of miles from Big Nug, and the blind trail, which you have most likely got here, leads up from the south, and here is the end of it. It is the end, anyhow, while Captain Crusher holds things the way he does, for he swears death to man, woman, child or beast that attempts to cross this tree."

"How does he make known this proclamation?"

"By calling out in warning to any one who starts to walk out upon this dead tree. My brother and I knew nothing about it, of course, though we wondered at the revolver out there, and we started to cross. We hadn't gone six steps when a voice from somewhere warned us to stop, declaring it would be death to us if we stepped over the mark of the death-line, the revolver."

"You don't know where the voice came from?"

"No; the chasm is so full of echoes that it was impossible to locate it. We stopped to consider it a moment, and decided not to be frightened out, so started forward. I was ahead, and just as I stepped over the weapon a bullet struck my arm, and a rifle echoed and re-echoed through the gorge. The next instant my brother threw up his arms and fell off the tree and down into the dismal depth. I heard the bullet hit him, and the next moment the report rung out again. I leaped for the ground here, and a third bullet barely missed me before I gained it."

"A close shave."

"I should say it was. Then there was a mocking laugh, and Captain Crusher sounded his warning again. I had seen enough to make me believe he meant what he said."

"When was this?"

"A week ago."

"Did you report it at Big Nug?"

"Yes, and got a party to go after my brother's body, which was found so terribly mangled as to be hardly recognizable. I had it buried, and over his grave I took oath of vengeance against his slayer."

"Good for you! Here's my hand on it that I'll help you. Maybe together we shall be able to run this outlaw down and bring him to time."

"I certainly hope so," and the two clasped hands.

"But what has brought you back to the same dangerous spot?"

They unclasped their hands and Seller drew something from his shirt in a gingerly fashion.

"I've got a dose of giant powder that I was going to put here under the butt of this tree and blow the whole thing from July to January. What do you think about it?"

"I wouldn't do it; at any rate, not yet."

"Why not?"

"We need this tree as a means of exploring what is beyond. We'll cross it, if you have the nerve to follow where I lead, and we'll probe the matter to the bottom and get at the truth of it somehow. What do you say to that?"

"I wouldn't try to cross it in open daylight for the State of California."

"No, I wouldn't care about it myself, after what you have told me; I mean some time later on. I would like, though, to hear from this Captain Crusher."

Thus saying, the younger man got up, stepped upon the tree, and began to advance toward the revolver where it lay close to the living tree by which the dead one was supported, as pictured.

He had taken but a few steps when a voice rung out:

"Stop! Advance at your peril! Cross the death-line, and death will be your portion, swift and sure! The death-line is the revolver before you. Heed the warning of Captain Crusher and live; disregard it, and you die."

That was all—quite enough, too.

The voice had sounded forth clear, sharp and distinct, and did not appear to be far away, but it was impossible to locate it. Did it come from the air above? or from the chasm below?

Several times the younger man called out, trying to get further words from the hidden speaker, but in vain, and at last he stepped back from the tree-trunk to the shoulder of rock. There he drew a revolver and tried a snap-shot at the weapon on the tree, causing it to leap high in the air and disappear into the gorge beneath. Taking then a dagger from his boot, he hurled it toward the spot where the revolver had been lying, and there it stuck, its point buried a couple of inches into the decaying wood!

"We'll mark the death-line with another token," he said to his companion, at the same time laughing lightly. "That will indicate that war has been declared, if the outlaw is able to read the signs aright. Come, let's be on toward Big Nug."

CHAPTER II.

MAYOR GIBSON'S WARNING.

THE camp of Big Nug was not a saintly place by any means.

It harbored about as rough a class, taking the majority, as could be found in any camp of the same size in the whole "woolly" West.

As we have heard, this camp had its birth from the finding there of a monster nugget, and now it was kept alive by the working of one paying mine, and by the "wash" in the numerous gulches.

The mine mentioned was the "Jack" Mine.

One Timothy Gibson was manager of it, and he was likewise mayor of the camp. In fact, he was the king of the "diggings"—something of a little czar.

Timothy was a man who did not admit an equal, so, from his point of view, we must mention one John Hartz in second place, though in local popularity it is just possible that he ranked first.

He was a younger man than the mayor, with more sportish dash about him, and was manager of the one first-class hotel of the camp—the Hotel Grande. He was a favorite with the sporting element of the camp's populace, and besides having the hotel, ran a paying gambling-den.

The mayor was alone in his office one afternoon when this sport dropped in upon him.

"Well, mayor, all alone, are you?" he greeted.

"As you see," was the response. "Fill up a chair and help me loaf."

"All right; and, here, you take a cigar and help me make smoke. We are hard workers, you and I."

"Ha! ha! Yes, I don't know of two men who find it harder to put in time. We are busy early and late, and never off duty."

"And yet there's little prospect of our getting rich."

"If any man in this camp has a better prospect than you, Hartz, I'd like to know who he is."

"Yourself, for instance."

"Never; at any rate not till that accursed Captain Crusher is crushed. He has despoiled me several times, you know."

"And me once. I wanted to talk with you about him, one reason why I dropped in to chat you out of your nap at this hour. Your offer of reward hasn't brought you any return."

"Not worth a cent. I've a notion to raise it."

"Don't believe it would do any good. If five hundred dollars won't fetch it, a thousand wouldn't."

"Well, maybe you are right, for there are a hundred men here who would wade through fire for five hundred dollars. But, we haven't heard from him in some time now, and it may be he's dusted out."

"If he troubles us again, do you know what I'm going to do?"

"No; what?"

"Send for Deadwood Dick."

"That dare-devil detective who has raised the dickens all around in spots here in the West!"

"Exactly. If any man living can bring this Captain Crusher to time, he is the individual. I'll bet it will be a case of the crusher crushed, if Dick Bristol gets after him in earnest."

"Do you think he would come?"

"Of course he'd come, if he knew just the case."

"But, rumor has it that he has made his pile, and I doubt whether he'd have anything to do with the matter, now."

"Yes, and rumor says further that this sort of thing is bread and meat—yes, and wine, too—with him; he had rather hunt down an outlaw than eat. He'll come if he is sent for, I feel dead sure."

"I hadn't thought of it, but maybe it would be a good idea to try him."

"Will you send? It would look better, coming from the mayor of the camp, you know, than from a fellow like me."

"Yes; but, if the raider is gone, what's the use sending? Hadn't we better wait and see if he puts in his appearance again? Then if he does, we'll go for him in hot style."

"The fact is, my dear mayor, I don't want to lose again at his hands. I have got together another snug little sum of the legal tender, and I thought if it was hinted that Deadwood Dick was here after the rascal it might have the good effect to scare him off for good and all."

"Yes, there's something in that; but, acting in my official capacity as mayor of the camp, it wouldn't look business-like, you know, to send for such a man as this Deadwood Dick merely because we thought we might be robbed. When you send for a detective, it seems to me, you want to have a case for him. When you put your dog in the field, he wants a scent."

"Words of wisdom, Gibson, no doubt; but, what applies to the mayor does not apply with equal force to me. I have no 'official capacity' to consider. I have a notion to drop a line to this man Bristol, anyhow, and see what he'll say, though I had much rather you would take the thing in hand. By the way, the Jack Mine must be getting quite a treasure on hand again, which ought to be looked after in your official capacity as manager of that concern."

"I admit that I have hesitated about making a shipment, Hartz, for dread of the outlaws, but the gold is being guarded every night by a couple of trusty fellows, so there is little danger that it can be disturbed here in camp."

"That's not a bad idea. Then you decline to correspond with the detective, I understand?"

"For the reason I have given you; no other."

"Enough said, then. By the way, what do you think of this new beauty who has just come to town?"

"The woman at the Hotel Grande?"

"Just so."

"She has the appearance of a charmer, but is deucedly reserved."

"So I thought, at first, but she warms up wonderfully when you come to know her. Had quite a chat with her this morning."

"Where was her attendant?"

"Oh, he was there, of course, standing behind her chair like a statue."

"She must have means, I take it, to be traveling with a lackey at her beck and call. What did you find out about her?"

"Why, she is a bluestocking, or something in that line, doing the Western camps in the interest of some magazine; that is, takes pictures and writes up what she sees and hears."

"I always associated a bluestocking, as you call her, with front curls and green goggles."

"They're delightfully missing here, anyhow," laughing.

"I'm aware of it. She is deucedly good-looking, Hartz, and if I didn't have to buck against you I believe I'd spruce up to her. What's her name again?"

"Elma St. James. No, you are not in it, mayor; you are getting on the shady side, you know. Ha! ha! Or, if you come in, you will have to buck against me, as you say."

"That's all right; but, how about Wat Cooper?"

The sport's face clouded instantly.

"Horse of another color," he growled.

"But, if Watson Cooper gets in my way somebody will get hurt, that is all."

"And maybe it will be you, eh?"

"Possibly; I'll take the chances of that. He has got to get up early to get ahead of me, that's all. I have got it in for him, anyhow, and the thing must come to a head sooner or later."

And so they talked on, from one thing to another, till at length their notice was drawn to the fact that something unusual was taking place in the street.

"Hello! what's wrong out there?" the mayor exclaimed.

"Something to draw a curious crowd, anyhow."

"Let's step out and see."

"I'm with you," and grabbing their hats they hurried out, to the place where the crowd was collected.

"What's going on, boys?" the mayor demanded, the moment he came up. "Has the twin nugget been found at last?"

"No, no twin nugget about it," he was told. "Captain Crusher has been heard from ergain, and he seems ter mean business straight through."

As he spoke, the man stepped back, motioning others to do the same, and a space was opened through which the mayor might advance into the center of the group.

This the mayor took advantage of immediately, the sport following him, and there in the ground almost buried to the hilt, was a dagger, with a flying paper attached to it by means of a stout string.

The paper was, more accurately described, a stiff, white cardboard, folded in square and again cornerwise, to something the outline of an octahedron, and to the apex the string, a couple of feet in length, was attached. It was, practically, the simple dart of the schoolboy.

The cardboard had served as a guide to insure the dagger's striking the ground point downward.

Somebody had unfolded the cardboard, but the string was still attached to it and the dagger had not been drawn out of the ground, and seeing writing on the paper the mayor read:

"TO MAYOR AND CITIZENS:—

"Here we are again. Captain Crusher sends you greeting. Have dropped around on business, and hope we won't have anything like an unpleasantness when I get down to it. If you value life and good health, don't raise your hand to oppose me when you see me getting in my fine work. The man that gets in my way gets crushed, that's all."

"CRUSHER, THE OUTLAW."

"Curse his impudence!" the mayor stormed; "where did the dagger come from, anyhow?"

"Et kem out of ther sky," was the ready response. "There was a flash, and it kem right down, with the paper flutterin', and stuck where ye see et."

The mayor looked up and around, as though he expected to discover the secret plainly written somewhere, but it remained

sealed to him. The street was wide, and over it hung the sky.

"It looks as though the mayor would have the opportunity to act in his official capacity, after all," remarked John Hartz, the sport, with a light laugh. "Your outlaw seems to have taken the aggressive, now, Mayor Gibson, and it falls to you to do something for the protection of your people."

He looked at the mayor keenly, and Gibson could not help remembering his mention regarding Deadwood Dick made only so short a time before.

"I guess you are right," the mayor agreed. "I'll consider it right away."

CHAPTER III. PISTOL PRACTICE.

THE shades of night had fallen ere Dick Sellers and his companion, Rod Sage, reached the camp.

A perfect understanding had been arrived at between them as they came down from the mountain heights, and Sage stood pledged to assist Seller in carrying out his scheme of vengeance.

Just as the pair were entering the camp at the head of the one main street something of a remarkable nature took place.

There was a sharp detonation, accompanied with a flash of light, high in the air over the camp.

It was about at the camp center, and over the main street.

"What's that?" Sage immediately inquired.

"Hang me if I know," answered Seller, wonderingly.

"Something new?"

"Never heard it before in the time I've been here."

At that moment it was heard again, with another flash, and now the street was full of people and the excitement was high.

"Well, this is rather awakening, I'll confess," Rod Sage declared. "One is led to imagine the camp is being bombarded. Come on and let's hear what the citizens have to say about it."

There was yet another report and flash, and immediately after that there came forth a shout of excitement from the crowd.

Over the camp now hung a cloud of powder smoke, bright and unfurling in the clear air, and upon it, in inky letters, were ominous words of warning.

The words were these:

DEATH TO DEADWOOD DICK!

The two men just in from the hills looked at it in the same degree of amazement as did all the rest. There was something new under the sun, it seemed, and here was a sample.

As the cloud rose higher and became thinner, the letters became less distinct, and of a sudden they were gone.

Immediately, though, they were replaced by others—

CAPTAIN CRUSHER.

These were faint, but plainly seen by all, and they remained upon the cloud till it had passed too far off to display them longer.

By this time Seller and Sage had reached the crowd.

"It beats all I ever heard of," Seller observed.

"Looks as though we have set out to crush a pretty big man," Sage responded in low tone. "Know anything about this Deadwood Dick?"

"I have heard a good deal about him. He's a detective, a terror to outlaws of every stripe and brand. Looks as though Captain Crusher has reason to think he's after him."

"Yes, so it does. His warning has made a big stir here, anyhow."

So it had, indeed. Everybody was excit-

ed, and the mayor about the most excited of all.

"I want to know what this means," he cried out. "I want to know how that was done? Who was it threw those bombs, or whatever they were?"

"Guess you'll have to ask Captain Crusher himself," spoke up one man.

"Yes, I'll ask him, curse him! I'll double the reward I've offered for him, that's what I'll do! Do you hear, men? It's a thousand dollars now for the outlaw, instead of five hundred!"

"Hooray!" was the cheer that went up.

"We'll have him, you bet!"

"That thousand is ours!"

"Count 'em out, mayor!"

And half a hundred similar cries, from every quarter.

"Yes, a thousand dollars for Captain Crusher, dead or alive!" the mayor made plain and definite. "We'll see whether we can't have law and order here."

There was plenty of light in the street, for every window was lighted up and there were lamps in the street besides, and every man could see who his neighbor was.

About the time the mayor spoke, as last quoted, one eager fellow caught sight of Rod Sage, laying hands on him straightway.

"Hyer!" he yelled out. "What's this hyer I've got? Hyer's a new face, and mebbe it's Captain Crusher himself! Ef it is, that thousand dollars is mine, and don't ye forget it!"

This fellow was one Boley Bone—or so he was called.

He was a powerful fellow, with the strength of an ox.

"Hands off!" Sage sternly ordered. "I'm not your Captain Crusher, or any kin to him, but I'll make you think I'm his dad if you don't take your paw off my collar instantly. Take it off, I tell you, sir!"

"He isn't Captain Crusher," spoke up Dick Seller. "He is a pard of mine, Boley."

"Pard of yours, is he? We don't know you yerself any too well, I reckon, do we, pards?"

"That's what we don't," was shouted by some of the most villainous-looking of the assembled crowd.

"Will you take your hand off?" demanded Sage, in a tone that clearly proved it to be the last time he would ask the question.

"Yas, when I git ready, I will—"

Chip!

He was ready then, it seemed, for he fell to the ground like a log, insensible.

The stranger had dealt him a blow under the jaw with the quickness of light, lifting him clear of the ground and laying him on his back.

"Does anybody else want some?" Rod demanded. "If he does, let him step up while it is on tap. I am not your Captain Crusher, as that fellow hinted, and I'm here to prove it."

"Boys, arrest that man," ordered the mayor.

All this had taken place in the briefest possible time, and the mayor had just found room to chip in.

"Think it over before you begin," the stranger called out sharply. "On what grounds do you order my arrest, sir? Simply because I am a stranger among you?"

"On the ground, sir, that this man declared you to be Captain Crusher, and by the right of being mayor of this camp and having it in my power to arrest whom I will. Boys, take him!"

"Boys, you had better go slow about it," the stranger coolly warned. "Let me at least have my say out before you pitch in. That fellow did *not* declare I was Captain Crusher; he simply called attention to the fact that I was a stranger. I deny your right to arrest me, Sir Mayor."

"I don't care what you deny; you'll find

that I am boss here and what I say goes. Citizens, take him!"

Rod Sage sprung back a step, covering the crowd with a brace of revolvers.

"Back!" he ordered. "What do you intend doing with me, Sir Mayor, I demand to know?"

"Hang ye!" bellowed the rougher element of the crowd.

"You have heard it," the mayor supported. "We'll give you a trial, and if you can *prove* you are not Captain Crusher, that will be all right; if you can't then you swing."

"There's fat justice in that, I must say," the stranger commented, laughing lightly. "Well, before you do any hanging you will have to take me, and I warn you if you try it on somebody is going to get hurt. Now, pitch in or leave me alone, just as you please."

This display of nerve chilled their ardor to a degree.

"And you may count me in, too," spoke up Dick Seller, drawing a weapon with his well right hand. "This man is my pard, and I'm not going to see him jumped on without doing my little best."

As he spoke he ranged himself shoulder to shoulder with Rod, but facing the other way to protect against attack from that direction.

"What are you going to do about it, Sir Mayor?" the stranger demanded.

"I'm going to show you, sir, that my commands here are law," was the thundered retort. "At him, men, and take him at any cost! I begin to think we'll have cause to hang him for the life of Boley Bone, anyhow."

There was a snarl from the crowd, like that of some fierce animal at bay, but they prudently hesitated.

"The result of this be on your head, Sir Mayor," Sage warned.

"On my head be it. I'm responsible for my conduct, when acting in my official capacity. Citizens of Big Nug, did you hear my order?"

That was a favorite expression with the mayor—his "official capacity."

On this demand, some one on the outer edge of the crowd fired a shot, and the ball was opened.

Others fired, and with a rush the crowd closed in. Then began about as lively a jubilee of the sort as can well be imagined.

Revolvers barked spitefully, bullets flew thick and fast—many of them harmlessly, but not all, and of the latter were the bullets from the weapons of Rod Sage.

Like lightning his shots rung out, this way and that, and every shot brought a yell of mortal pain and the victim bit the dust. The stranger stood alone, too, for Dick Seller was down.

But, it was soon over.

The stranger's weapons were quite emptied, and nothing remained for him but to try to fight his way through the crowd with his revolvers as clubs.

This was impossible, however, and in a moment more he was overpowered by force of numbers, his weapons snatched from him, and he was helplessly a prisoner.

"That's what I'm going to do about it, curse you!" cried the mayor.

"Well, it was all one-sided, and I couldn't expect anything else," was the cool rejoinder.

"And now you'll hang anyhow, for the lives of these brave fellows," the mayor added. "There's no need of a trial to prove your work here."

The crowd howled its approval.

"I don't disclaim it," the stranger defiantly rejoined. "I don't think I wasted a single bullet, and I'm only sorry my weapons hadn't fifty shots in each. Go ahead and do your worst; but, before you begin let me tell you who I am: I am not the outlaw, Captain Crusher, but I am Deadwood Dick, Junior,

the independent detective. I fought in self-defense simply, as I would do again. Now, hang me if you want to!"

CHAPTER IV.

CHEATING THE HANGMAN.

THIS announcement caused a stir of excitement of another sort.

Was this Deadwood Dick, the prince of Western detectives? No wonder his revolver had been so deadly!

The men who had hold upon him almost allowed him to go free, and maybe would have done so but for quick action on the part of the mayor, who came to their aid immediately.

"That's a likely story!" he cried. "Don't let him fool you that way, boys. We know a trick worth two of that, I'm thinking. Ten to one Boley Bone was right, and this is Captain Crusher and nobody else. Anyhow, he's a murderer now, and what he needs is a rope!"

The wavering crowd was won back immediately—that is to say, the rough and reckless element of it.

There were others who did not quite agree with the mayor in his peremptory ruling in the case, and one of these now rose to a point of order—so to put it, no other than John Hartz.

"Hold hard just a moment, Mayor Gibson!" he sung out. "It strikes me this is going a little too hasty, for there is a possibility that you may make a mistake in the matter, you know. This maybe Deadwood Dick, as he declared. And, anyhow, if he fought only in self-defense, and he did that, he is no murderer."

"Let me remind you that I am mayor of this camp!" the mayor stiffly answered.

"I don't care if you are two mayors; I have a right to raise an objection if I want to, and you have heard what it is."

"And that's all it amounts to! Bring a rope, somebody, and we'll see who is boss here and who isn't. And we'll show this fellow that blood can't be spilt here and the spiller go free."

"Hooray! That's ther stuff, mayor!"

"A necktie party, in ther real old-fashion way!"

"Bring on ther rope, and we'll work him off in style, you bet!"

"Mayor, I tell you you are too hasty," the sport protested again. "You had better imprison him till morning, and then see what he can prove regarding himself."

"And you had better be minding your own business!" was the sharp retort. "I know what I'm doing, I guess. Do you suppose I can look upon ten or a dozen good citizens dead, and spare their murderer?"

"But, it was a fight, that he didn't bring on."

"He had no business to fight when arrested. It proves him guilty, or he wouldn't have done it. What had he to fear, unless he was guilty?"

"I had everything to fear," spoke up Dick—he it was, the redoubtable Richard. "You said unless I could prove I was not Captain Crusher I must swing, and a man isn't always prepared to prove his identity in a second."

"Which is saying you are not prepared to prove that you are Deadwood Dick, as now you claim."

"It is easily done, if you happen to have any one here who has ever seen me."

"And I don't believe there is. Does any man answer?"

No one did, and the point missed.

"You see how it is," said the mayor to the sport, then. "The honor and safety of this camp are at stake, and this man must swing."

"I don't agree with you at all," Hartz retorted. "You just lock the fellow up for some days and give him a chance, and anyhow give him a trial before you send him off. Come, mayor, a fair deal, you know."

"Well, I'll leave it to the crowd," the mayor offered compromise. "We'll let it be as they say."

"Hang him!" came from a hundred throats at once.

"No, no; give him a fair show!" came the scattered vote of the minority.

"Hang him! Hang him! Up with him, and we'll have the trial after that! We want ther fun!"

"You see how it is," the mayor called attention. "It is the voice of the people, and the voice of the people must be obeyed. In my official capacity I am their servant."

"Is it a hang?"

"Yes; do as you please with him, men!"

A rope had been brought, and with wild yells the mob dragged Dick toward a tree.

Dick had looked at Dick Seller, while his fate was being decided, and was assured that he was dead. A bullet had found a vital spot.

He also looked in the direction of Boley Bone as he was being dragged away, and saw that worthy was about coming out of the state of insensibility into which he had knocked him.

Those who were in favor of imprisoning the prisoner and holding him for fair trial, were so far in the minority that they could not oppose the mob.

They could only follow at a short distance, trying to devise some scheme by which to balk them.

But this it did not seem likely they could accomplish, now.

Dick was as good as hanged already.

There was a tree not far from the front of the Hotel Grande, and to that the prisoner had been dragged and the rope was about his neck.

"Now, all ready," one fellow sung out. "Somebody climb ther tree and put ther rope over ther limb."

Twenty willing ones sprung to perform this pleasant duty, but way was given to the man who was so fortunate as to have the end of the rope in hand.

Up he climbed, while the crazy horde cheered, carrying the rope in his teeth, but he had barely climbed his length above the heads of the crowd, when he suddenly uttered a cry, threw up his arms, and fell to the ground, dead!

There was silence instantly.

"What means this?" cried the mayor, the first to speak.

"Et looks like he was shot," answered one man, "but nobody heard a shot fired, I guess."

He was right; nobody had heard it.

The man was dead, nevertheless, and a hasty examination showed a bullet-hole in his breast from which his life-blood was gushing.

"What did I tell you?" cried the mayor. "It is Captain Crusher, and nobody else, and this is the work of some of his tools! He shall hang now, if I have to do the work myself."

It looked as though the crowd was willing he should undertake it.

"Somebody climb that tree," the mayor ordered. "Are you all cowards? Fifty dollars to the man who will put the rope over the limb!"

The limb was too high up and the foliage too thick to admit of the rope being thrown over, so in order to get it in place over the limb, some one had to climb the trunk and put it there.

This offer had the desired effect, and one daring fellow stepped forward to offer his services.

Taking the rope as the first had done, he began the climb.

While the crowd breathlessly watched him, something else was taking place of which they were unaware.

A woman had come forth from the hotel, had hastened to the place where the fight

had occurred, and there, stooping over the body of Dick Seller, she took papers from his pocket.

This accomplished, she hastened to the tree around which the excited crowd had gathered.

The man had just climbed above the heads of those around.

"Go on," roared the mayor, as the fellow there paused as though afraid to proceed further. "Go on, I tell you!"

"He's a coward!" some one sneered.

This had the desired effect, and the fellow climbed on, having placed his body on the opposite side of the tree from that the first climber had occupied when shot.

His fate, nevertheless, was to be the same. He had climbed but a few feet higher when he, too, threw up his arms and fell backward, uttering only a groan, striking the ground with a chilling thud.

"Cowards!" rung out a woman's voice, clear and sharp, and a woman forced her way to the center of the group.

There was light enough for all to see, for the night air was still and several lamps had been brought from the shops and shanties near at hand, and the woman was recognized.

It was Elma St. James, the lady who was stopping at the Hotel Grande!

"Cowards!" she repeated, stepping before the prisoner, between him and the thick of the throng. "Cowards! to array yourselves thus against one man."

"Do not mind them, lady," spoke Dick, coolly. "They will probably get enough of it before they are done with the work they have begun. Let them go on with their frolic."

Such coolness was characteristic of Deadwood Dick.

"No, they shall not go on with their mad work, sir. I know you are not the outlaw, as they claim, for I recognize you."

"You know me, then?"

"I do."

"Who is he?" demanded the mayor.

"He is Richard Bristol—known as Deadwood Dick, Junior, sir."

"And where did you see him, to know him? Tell us that."

"At his own place, Bristol City, where I have recently been, sir! Saw him there frequently, so know him well."

"Are you satisfied?" Deadwood Dick demanded. "Or must you still insist upon hanging me?"

"I accept the proof, of course, sir," was the answer. "But, tell me, how came these men by their death? Was that your work?"

"It could not well be, as you had me here a prisoner."

"Was it the work of some aide of yours?"

"It certainly was not done by a foe, that speaks for itself. It will be useless for you to question further. To you, lady, I must express thanks for the service you have rendered."

"It was nothing, sir. But, they have not released you. Sir Mayor, why do you not order his release?"

"For the reason, lady, that, whoever he is, he is answerable for the lives of the men who fell by his hand, and we must hold him on that account."

"And he fought only in self-defense!"

"Why did he not declare himself as Deadwood Dick as soon as he came to camp?"

"Little good it would have done," Dick here spoke up. "I have not forgotten the warning on the smoke-cloud, Mayor Gibson."

"What do you mean?"

"This: That my coming here was evidently known and looked-for, and that there was a scheme on foot to dispose of me as soon as possible after my arrival. More, only one action on your part will clear you of suspicion of having had a hand in it, Mr. Mayor."

CHAPTER V.

WAS IT CRUSHER, AFTER ALL?

THE mayor looked at the captive prince of detectives in something of a startled manner.

"What do you mean now?" he demanded, with the suggestion of a choking in his throat. "Would you insinuate that I am in league with that rascal?"

"I don't insinuate anything, unless you want to take it that way. You seem determined that I should die; now you have the chance to show your willingness for me to live."

"But, who has a suspicion that I have had a hand in it?"

"I cannot answer for anybody but myself."

"Well, I want you to understand that you are away off the track, sir. I know nothing about Captain Crusher. It was for this I was determined the suspicion against you should be supported—"

"And that, innocent or guilty, I must die; yes, I understand the game."

"Well, you will be given a trial, now, to answer for the lives of these good men who have fallen by your hand, Dick Bristol, if you are that person."

"And who is going to try me? Does your authority as mayor of this hole outrank mine as *United States Marshal*? If it does, go ahead! There may be something to follow, and something may drop—sudden!"

The mayor's "official capacity," so called, withered.

"Well, I don't know but you have the best of it," he admitted. "Let him go, men, but he'll have to answer for it all the same."

"Hold on a minute," spoke up another voice.

The speaker was a younger man than the mayor, a rather good-looking fellow of thirty or so.

"What is it, Wat?" the mayor asked.

It was Watson Cooper, whose name has been already mentioned.

"Even the President is answerable for murder, Mayor Gibson, and the meanest justice in the land has the power to arrest him. You are in the right in this matter, and I wouldn't give in an inch, even to a *United States Marshal*."

"That's ther talk!" cried the rough part of the crowd, approvingly.

"What is it to you?" demanded Dick, sharply and scrutinizingly.

"Nothing; only one of your victims was a friend of mine; that's all."

"So was Dick Seller a friend of mine; who is answerable for his death? There are two sides to the matter, as you all will find out to your sorrow!"

"It's on your own head," the mayor declared.

"Wrong there, Mr. Mayor," Dick reminded. "Before a shot was fired I warned you that it would rest upon you, and you said upon my head be it! But, upon your head it is, now. You can't get out of it, and I shall see the matter through."

"If he is what he claims he did not come here in his true character," Wat Cooper asserted now, as if to help the mayor's cause; "and we could know nothing about him. Even yet we have not the *proof*. It is possible for this lady to be mistaken, and his own statement does not count, in a case like this."

"I am not mistaken, gentlemen," Elma St. James insisted, promptly and confidently.

"And that is proof enough upon which to let the man go," put in John Hartz.

"Mayor, you are in the wrong this time, sure. That is plain to everybody."

"I am, am I? Then we'll let it stand that way. I want it known that what I say goes, and I don't take direction from any man when acting in my official capacity. So, men, lock him up! I'll be responsible for consequences."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Dick, lightly. "Your orders belie your words, Sir Mayor. A moment ago you ordered my release, but when this man Cooper chipped in you flopped over like a flapjack on a griddle. You are not equal to your official capacity at all; in my opinion you are a humbug!"

"Your opinion isn't asked for," the mayor snapped, "and I'll show you who is master here!"

"Away with him," ordered Cooper, as by authority.

"No, we won't lock him up; we'll hang him and have it done with," cried Boley Bone, forcing his way to the front, one of his jaws badly swollen, the effects of the blow he had received. "Lend a hand pards, and we'll show him a trick!"

"Hold!"

A revolver in the hand of Elma St. James brought the ruffian to a stop.

"What d'ye mean, gal?" he demanded, savagely. "Take that thing out o' my face, will ye!"

"I will not! If you value your life, don't advance another step. This man has befriended me, and as I can render him a service now I'm going to do it, so move at your peril!"

"Dat's phwat's dhe matter wid Hannar!" a strong Irish voice supported, and the young woman's lackey stepped to her side, a brace of revolvers in his grasp. "Oi'm dhe b'y as can make a subject fur an inquist as n'ate as dhe next wan, begorra!" and his face showed a terrible determination beneath its ample smile.

"You'll be a subject fer a pine box, if ye don't git out of the way," was the angry growl.

"Dhere will be two av us, dhen, begob! an' its Patsy O'Glory who is talkin' now—mind that, ye spalpeen!"

"Boys, is this fellow going to escape what he deserves?" Boley cried in rage. "Ar' boys like Higgin an' my pard Slikes ter go down unavenged? An' most of ye has lost a pard, I see by ther count."

"No! no!" the crowd roared, in response. "Up with him! We'll hang him, anyhow, mayor or no mayor! At him, pards, and short work of it! If we make a mistake an' hang a *United States Marshal*, that ain't our fault, we didn't know it. At him!"

"It will be your death if you advance," warned the young woman, undauntedly.

Her pretty lips were tight compressed, and her beautiful eyes glittered in a way bespeaking "business." Revolver in hand, she looked like a defiant queen.

"Dhat same it will!" echoed Patsy O'Glory. "Oi am here as big as a house, phwere me missus chips in, and don't ye forget *dhat*. Go on, now! If dhere's bound to be a ruction, you'll pay de fiddler—every wan ov ye!"

"Great hokus!" screamed Boley. "Ar' we goin' to be bluffed by a *woman*, boys? I reckon not!"

All the same, he held back, knowing what was good for him.

The hands of the prisoner had been bound, and the rope was yet about his neck, but no one now had hold of the rope.

"Cover them," the woman said to her servant, "and drop the first man who makes a move against us. I'll see whether Mr. Bristol shall go free or not!"

She had drawn a knife while speaking, and turning suddenly, she cut the rope from Dick's neck, and also the bonds that held his wrists. That done, she slipped a revolver into his hand.

"Thanks, lady!" Dick coolly and quietly acknowledged. "I may some time be able to return the favor. You had better retire out of danger, now, and let me deal with this catamount, which I feel quite able to do, now that I am once again free and armed. I cannot allow you to risk your life, so please retire!"

"Yes, git out of ther way; jest do!" Boley Bone urged. "Let ther fun begin over again, an' we'll see what'll be ther end of et. Git out o' range, fer we don't keer to hurt a woman."

"No, I'll share your danger, now, till you are safe, sir," the woman made reply to Dick. "Let's back away from here."

Being on the edge of the crowd, they had the advantage.

Dick saw this was his golden opportunity, and raised no further objection but took advantage of it.

The woman was in even less danger than she would be should she leave him and a rapid firing ensue, for it was not likely the men would fire upon her. Her death would be their disgrace.

"Well, come on, then!" Dick assented. "Woe to the man who fires a shot in the direction of this lady!" he added, to the infuriate mob.

They backed away, the Irishman with them, in the direction of the hotel.

Boley Bone bellowed and brayed loudly, urging upon the crowd not to let the man escape, but, having evidently had enough for one night, the crowd was loth to obey his call.

So it was that the trio reached the piazza of the hotel without a move having been made to hinder them.

At the steps, though, the woman turned suddenly and darted into the house, her lackey following her, while Dick at once disappeared around a corner of the building.

This was the signal for a wild roar from the mob, and, as one man, they made a rush, shouting aloud their intention of lynching Dick without parley if they only got hold of him again.

That, however, they were not destined to do, that night.

Around the hotel they rushed, in a body, letting go a great scattering fire from their revolvers, aimlessly, but the object of their wrath was not to be discovered.

A few moments later, when the crowd had come to a stop and were discussing the situation, there came a shout of defiance from the street in the opposite direction.

Back to the street the mob skurried, and there, on horseback, was the man they were hunting, dashing away from them like the wind!

Another shout of defiance, accompanied with the firing of revolvers, and he was beyond the reach of their bullets and the fire they sent after him was harmless. A moment later he had disappeared.

The cheated mob howled its disappointment.

"Well, what have you got to say now?" demanded the mayor of Sport Hartz, in a savage way.

"I say he's done a sensible thing in thus saving his skin," was the answer. "He has carried away the impression that Big Nug is a hard place, I am afraid, and we may expect to hear from him again."

"Do you believe it was Deadwood Dick?"

"We have the word of the lady to that effect, as well as his own statement."

"She may be mistaken; or, what's worse, she may be in the game with him. It is hard to tell. I think it's plain now it was Captain Crusher."

"I can't see it."

"Would Deadwood Dick steal a horse? This fellow came here afoot, so far as I know, but he has gone away mounted; and, by the way he dusted down the road I think he straddled your own mare."

"Dash it! I never thought of that!"

"You don't think of everything, then. I'll bet you'll find your mare missing, if you go and look."

"Come on, then, and we'll soon know the truth about it. If it's so, that will be your strongest argument yet that the fellow really was Captain Crusher."

They hurried away in the direction of the hotel stables, followed by an eager crowd.

The mayor was right; the sport's mare was missing!

"What did I tell you?" Gibson demanded exultingly.

"We are entitled to an explanation from that woman," the sport answered. "I will have it, too."

He strode away to the hotel entrance at once, the mayor at his heels eager to see what would come of it, and entering, the sport sent to the room occupied by the woman, asking an interview.

CHAPTER VI.

"DEATH TO DEADWOOD DICK!"

THE interview requested by Mr. John Hartz was granted.

Miss St. James sent word that she would repair to the parlor of the hotel, where she would see him.

So, the sport and the mayor went thither, and after a short delay the woman entered, followed as usual by her Irish lackey, who was seldom absent from her presence.

This faithful body-guard had a narrow cot, in which he slept in the hall at night across the door of the room his mistress occupied. In order for any harm to come to her, it must first encounter Patsy O'Glory.

"What is your pleasure, gentlemen?" the lady asked, on entering the room.

"I desire to ask a question or two regarding this man Deadwood Dick," Hartz came to the point.

"Very well; I will answer if I can."

"Are you sure this man was he?"

"Positively."

"No chance for a mistake on your part, eh?"

"No chance whatever. I know the man was Deadwood Dick, Junior, he and none other."

"You said you had met him at Bristol City, I believe; that he once befriended you. Correct me if I am wrong in what I assert."

"You are correct, sir."

"Can you tell me, then, how it was he addressed you as a *stranger*, from the first to last?"

"I did not take the trouble to inquire, sir."

"You were plucky to defend him as you did, and deserve all praise for it; but, I have reason to believe that you have been imposed upon. We now think this man was the outlaw, without doubt."

"No, it was Deadwood Dick—Richard Bristol."

"May have looked like Deadwood Dick, can't you admit? You saw him only by night, you know. Won't you admit the possibility of a mistake?"

"I will not, sir; I am positive. Did he not state who he was before I came upon the scene at all?"

"And was not that statement calculated to lead you astray regarding your recognition? Knowing his similarity in appearance to Deadwood Dick may have led him to declare himself that person."

"It is useless for us to talk further about it, Mr. Hartz; I know this man was Richard M. Bristol—*Deadwood Dick, Junior*."

"That is what I wanted to come at. I am forced, now, to look upon Deadwood Dick as a thief."

"A thief!"

"And of the meanest sort—a horse-thief."

The lady now smiled, as though she understood what the whole matter was.

"Because, under press of circumstances, he was forced to *borrow* a horse in order to make good his escape."

"A strange way to borrow!"

"He had no time and no choice. But, from what I know of Deadwood Dick, and what I have heard about him, you need not be uneasy about the animal, if it was one of yours; it is safe, in his keeping."

"You think he'll return it?"

"As surely as the sun will appear in its accustomed place to-morrow morning, sir. If not, then you will receive four or five times its value in money. You do the man greatest injustice when you think otherwise of him. His reputation ought to be sufficient guarantee."

"As it would have been, had I been sure the man was Deadwood Dick. Now that you state it so positively, I am content."

"I am glad I have been able to convince you."

"You have also impressed me that this man must be something to you. You certainly risked your life for him."

"I would have been an ingrate not to have done so. He once befriended me, a thing I could never forget. That is all there is to it, sir, I assure you."

"Which I am glad to know. I thought—maybe—"

"What did you think?"

"Well, that possibly there was a trifle of affection at the back of it all, and that—"

"Ha, ha! Why, are you not aware that Deadwood Dick is a married man? No, no; you are very far wrong in that conjecture, sir."

"I am glad to know it, I assure you again, and—"

"That is all you wanted to see me for?"

"Well, yes, at present."

"Then you will please excuse me, for I have some writing I desire to do before I retire."

She rose, bowed, and withdrew from the room, her Irish servant with her.

"Well, what do you think now?" Hartz asked of the mayor.

"I begin to believe it must have been Deadwood Dick, after all," the answer. "She's positive enough, that is dead sure."

"Yes; and, by the way, I have never thought to ask if you sent for him after our talk the other day, and after the warning of the dagger."

"Yes, I sent for him; sent a letter out the same day, asking him to come here and see me, but not letting him know much about the case. Though I would be all the surer of getting him if I held that back."

"And you got no answer?"

"No."

"Well, that's strange. Deadwood Dick is a man of business, and I should think he would have answered."

"I have been looking for him to come in person, instead."

"Then your action respecting this man is all the more impossible to understand. If you were looking for Deadwood Dick, why did you insist upon hanging the man who declared that he was the great detective?"

"Because I was sure he was lying. I never dreamed of a millionaire detective coming here in a guise like that."

"Then you have missed it, for you have done enough to the man to make him your foe instead of friend. If there is anything shady about your record, mayor, you had better look out; Deadwood Dick is now on your trail!"

"Confound your impudence! You speak as though I might be an ex-road-agent, or something worse. No; when he comes to look at the matter in the right light, he will see I acted for the best. Captain Crusher is a dread, and if I had hands on him it was my duty to hang him."

"Well, we won't question *that* further; life is too short. What do you bet on my getting the mare back?"

"Oh! I think she'll come back all right, or her worth, after what we have now heard."

"Was in hopes I could strike a bet with you the other way."

"No, for I think you'll get her."

"I'm glad of one thing, mayor, that you didn't hang him. That would have been the

worst that ever happened here, or could happen. The next to it was the close call you gave him. I say, now—Look out for Deadwood Dick!"

"No cause to look out for him, my dear Hartz; not likely he'll stoop to the rather questionable business of seeking a personal revenge out of it, and if he looks for anything further than that he will find that my record is clean. No; he ought to be satisfied with the number he laid out in the fight."

"That was terrible, wasn't it! Hello! what's this about?"

There was shouting in the street again, and leaving the parlor the two men hastened to learn what it was about.

Men were running toward the hotel, and the sound of hoofs near at hand greeted their ears as they stepped out upon the piazza, and immediately the sport's mare thundered up to the steps and stopped.

She gave forth a snort, as of terror, as she did so.

"The mare!" Hartz cried.

"As I live it is!" echoed the mayor.

"She's dumped him!" some one in the crowd guessed.

"Not much, for here is a note attached to the saddle," apprised the owner of the animal.

He had stepped forward and laid hold on the bridle, quieting the mare, and as he spoke he plucked a folded paper from under the snap of the horn.

"What is it?" asked the mayor, somewhat eagerly.

"Take it and see," was the answer, tossing it to him.

The mayor picked the paper up, and by the light of the piazza lamp read it, his face paling as he did so.

"What is it?" demanded the eager crowd.

"What is it, mayor? Read it out so's we kin all have ther news. Was ther man Deadwood Dick? or was he really ther outlaw, Captain Crusher?"

"It's a threat, that's what it is," the mayor snarled. "Just hearken to this, will you:

"DECLARATION."

"TO THE MAYOR AND CITIZENS OF BIG NUG, ONE AND ALL:

"You have, by your action of this night, incurred my bitter hatred, and my hand is against you, from this hour. Honest men have nothing to fear, but let all others tremble. You would have hanged me, but for the bravery of a noble woman. You will find that this my declaration against you is not idle. With thanks for the use of the horse I was obliged to borrow, I am, your implacable Nemesis,

"DEADWOOD DICK, JR."

"What did I tell you?" demanded the sport.

"What did you tell me?" the mayor snapped in.

"I foretold something like this, if I mistake not."

"This Deadwood Dick is a rascal! None but a rascal would make such threats against a camp. You notice he says one and all."

"With the exception of honest men," corrected the sport. "After all, mayor, it may have a good effect."

"I don't see how."

"Why, I think if you post this up where it can be seen by everybody, there will follow an exodus of the undesirable element from the place, and the moral atmosphere will be cleared."

"I'll post it, anyhow, and let every man be prepared for the worst. How will this fellow be able to tell the difference between honest men and dishonest? Can he read thoughts? Why, he is likely to strike the

best man in the place as the worst. But, he may get into trouble."

At that moment came again that loud detonation overhead which had been heard earlier in the evening, and again was seen the luminous cloud of smoke.

For a few seconds it was spotless, and then upon it suddenly appeared the words as before—

"DEATH TO DEADWOOD DICK!"

CHAPTER VII.

PROPOSING A PLEASURE.

DEADWOOD DICK's declaration was posted, as the mayor had said it would be, and to a certain extent it had the effect John Hartz had prophesied.

Certain men of the camp suddenly found they had business elsewhere, and they did not stand upon the order of going, either, but went. They had their own reasons, and each one knew his own reason best.

Some of these, too, were men against whom nothing was known there, at the camp, and perhaps not all of them had been moved by the threats set forth in the declaration, but it looked suspicious. Still, as one blunt fellow remarked, if every man left who had a spot on his name, the camp would be a lonesome place for the saintly few.

A couple of days passed.

The heroine of the camp was Elma St. James, who had so boldly come to the rescue of Deadwood Dick in his time of peril.

Every man in the camp admired her for her pluck, and not a few for herself. And chief among these was John Hartz, who seemed to have struck up quite a favorable acquaintance with her.

His strongest rival was Watson Cooper.

These two, for some reason, had never been friends, and now the breach between them was widening to a dangerous extent.

One day, after Hartz had been in conversation with the lady on the hotel piazza for some time, Cooper came along just as he took his leave of her, and speaking to her, ascended the steps and asked permission to sit down.

It was granted, and he took the chair his rival had just vacated.

"Have you secured any new pictures to-day?" he inquired, "Or any new material to inspire your pen?"

"No, I have not, sir," was the pleasant response. "Why, have you thought of something to interest me? Or of some spot I have not visited? You have already helped me to several excellent pictures."

"Oh! there are hundreds of spots you have not visited, Miss St. James, but after all there is a sameness about this rugged grandeur, when one has taken as many lasting impressions of it as you have. Then, too, Mr. Hartz must have told you of every point of interest."

"He has helped me much, I admit."

"Has he told you about Captain Crusher's death-line?"

"No; but I have heard something of the sort talked about."

"Well, there is one spot you ought not to miss, while you are here."

"Tell me about it, Mr. Cooper."

"It is a place far up in the mountains, quite a distance from here and very difficult of access from the camp. A fallen tree spans a gorge, and on that tree is a revolver, which marks the death-line."

"How romantic!"

"Yes; one would hardly believe it without seeing it for himself. Well, when any one attempts to cross that tree, or rather the chasm on the tree, a voice of warning is heard, warning the trespasser to go back and if the warning is not heeded it is a death-line indeed."

"And tragic, too!"

"It will give you an idea for quite a story, Miss St. James, and I wonder that Hartz has not told you about it."

"Knowing my adventurous spirit, he no doubt feared I would insist upon going there, and he would not desire me to take the risk. That, at least, looks reasonable, I think."

"Then I ought to be severely condemned for my thoughtlessness, perhaps. You will look upon his action with greater favor than mine."

"Not so, for I am really delighted to know about the place."

"But, you will now desire to visit it, I fear. No, I ought not to say I fear, after having told you it is the one spot you ought not to miss. In fact, I intended to offer myself as your guide to the place."

"For which I thank you, Mr. Cooper. I will think about it, and if I fully decide upon going you shall conduct me."

"Thanks. And, I hope you will think favorable of it. There is, really, no danger, if one does not attempt to cross the chasm. At any rate I have never heard of harm coming to any one otherwise."

"Has any one come to his death there?"

"At least one man has, of a certainty, and another, was wounded at the same time."

"Awful! Tell me about that, please."

"They were brothers, named Seller. They came this way prospecting, and finding signs in the gorge, set out to discover the source. Their hunt brought them to the tree, and in defiance of the warning of Captain Crusher they attempted to cross. One was killed instantly, and the other had his arm shattered."

"That was terrible! And can this outlaw not be found out and arrested?"

"It seems not. He is wary. The mayor of the camp has done his best, and has a standing reward for the capture of the fellow, a reward which he has recently doubled, but thus far it has been of no avail."

"And what do you suppose the rascal has hidden there, that he is so determined to guard the secret?"

"Why, it is thought it must be his stronghold."

"Then I should think your mayor would take a force of men and go and drive him out."

"Really, I don't believe the man has thought of that, Miss St. James. But, I doubt if he could find men willing to take the risk. They could be shot off the tree faster than they could attempt to cross."

"Yes, that is so, too. No doubt he has weighed well the chances and decided against it."

"When will you take me there, Mr. Cooper?"

"At any time you say."

"Well, I will let you know. We will make up a party, of course, say half a dozen or so."

"If you desire; but if John Hartz is to be one of the party I cannot go, for we are not friends—much the less so since your coming here."

"I am aware that you and he are not on good terms, and had no thought of asking him. It would not be pleasant for either of you. I will ask the mayor, for one, and some others."

"Yes, the mayor will be delighted if you will so honor him, I am sure."

"Then it only remains to fix upon the time. I will let you know in a day or so; I cannot go to-day."

"Suit your own pleasure; my pleasure will be to serve you when you are ready, even at the shortest notice. You will need to be well rested when you undertake the jaunt, however."

"I will gather up strength for it from this moment."

So the arrangement was made.

The lady's lackey had been behind her

chair, in his accustomed place, during the conversation.

"What do you think about it, Patsy?" the lady asked, when Cooper had finally taken his leave. "Do you think it will be safe?"

"Begorra, it is not fur dhe loikes av mesel' to be giving advice to y'ure ladyship," the broad-spoken Irishman responded. "And dhen me opinion is not worth a cint a pound anyhow."

"Answer my question, please."

"Well, thin, Oi don't see anyting wrong about it, sure. But moind ye, av ye do go and Oi go wid ye, not wan stip will Oi be afther allowing av y'ure ladyship to be putting av her fut on dhat ould tree, moind ye, aven av ye discharge me from y'ure service dhat same minute."

"Have no fear for me in that direction, Patsy, I am not courting such risks. Maybe I will call upon you to try the experiment."

"Good hivvins! Would ye have me die av froight dhere in dhe prisence av all dhe company?"

The lady laughed, and so the matter was dropped.

Before night the lady had made up her mind to take the excursion on the following morning.

She apprised Cooper accordingly, and invited the mayor and a few others, so that, with her servant, there would be five men of the party and two women—the wife of one of the men having been requested to go.

It was after supper that John Hartz next found opportunity for converse with the camp's fairest guest.

She was on the piazza, in her accustomed place, and he joined her with an apology for breaking in upon a seeming reverie.

"You are welcome," she greeted, "and I am glad to have company. Pray sit down and take the scolding I have to give you—Yes, a severe scolding, sir."

His look of amazement had led her to add the last words, but as she spoke she laughed lightly.

"I guess it can be nothing very serious," he remarked, as he sat down. "What is it I have done to merit your displeasure?"

"Why did you never tell me about the place spoken of as Captain Crusher's death-line?"

"Ha! I might have expected it. My punishment, however, is severe enough, so pray forego the scolding."

"Your punishment?"

"Yes; the severest you could have inflicted. You have not invited me to accompany you and your party on your trip to-morrow. The mayor told me about it, and he is delighted. He was amazed to learn that I had not been asked. I speak frankly, you see."

"And my scolding is to be more in the nature of an apology, Mr. Hartz. You and Mr. Cooper are not friends, as I happen to know, and as it was he who brought the matter to my mind he fell naturally into place as leader of the party, and for sake of harmony I purposely slighted you. But, you are saved a wearying jaunt, so what need you care after all?"

"Cooper will find it a delightful one, and will not think of the hard climb once, I venture to say."

"Which would be a pleasure for neither, were both to go."

"You are right; I cannot complain."

"You certainly ought not to complain, but rather ought to thank me for thus sparing you at least once upon these my wearying excursions, sir."

"One could not grow weary in your company. But, as I said, my punishment is brought about by my own act, and I accept it. I could have told you about this place, but I knew the danger."

"I hardly know which I ought to thank the more, then, you who would have spared

me the danger, or Mr. Cooper who has provided the pleasure for me. I'll have to be candid and thank you both. However, I do not anticipate any danger, Mr. Hartz."

"There is always danger where Captain Crusher is concerned, Miss St. James, and had I power to do so I would forbid your going there to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME SNAP-SHOTS TAKEN.

ON the following morning the little party set out upon their excursion.

The happiest man of all, if appearances counted, was Mayor Gibson, though if it had been voted, Cooper would have contested the honors with him.

They were all mounted, and Miss St. James and the other woman of the party rode side by side, Patsy O'Glory coming just behind them, the other members being in advance.

Nothing of interest took place on the way; and their conversation can well be omitted.

It was past noon when they reached their destination.

Their horses had been left further down the trail, and they had accomplished the last stage of the journey on foot.

"What a small place!" Miss St. James exclaimed, as she came out upon the narrow shoulder of rock with the others, and she hugged close to the wall as if afraid of falling off.

"Is it not as I described it to you?" Cooper asked.

"Yes, yes, it is just as you described it. You are quite an artist in words, Mr. Cooper— No, I must take that back; I find a flaw in your picture."

"Where?"

"There; on the tree; you said it was a revolver, but it is dagger instead, I see."

"The deuce!—your pardon."

"Why, it was revolver, for I saw it myself," declared the mayor.

"So did I," yet another attested. "Captain Crusher has no doubt seen fit to change it."

"And it has been done since the last time I was here, too," Cooper averred. "Well, dagger or revolver, the meaning is the same, no doubt. Now, Miss St. James, for your pictures."

The lady carried a photographic outfit, and she removed it from the strap by which it was suspended from her shoulder and adjusted it.

Her first picture was of the tree that crossed the gorge, after which she snapped several others in succession, finally declaring herself satisfied and returning the instrument to its place.

"And now for the pleasure of hearing the warning voice of Captain Crusher," Cooper suggested.

"No, no," the young woman quickly objected, "you must not take any risk on my account, sir; I will not allow it."

"But, that is half the value of the visit," the man urged. "I will step upon the tree and go out far enough to be seen, and the warning will come and I will make haste to get back again to cover."

"But, is there not danger that there will be a bullet first and the warning after?"

"I think not; that has not been the experience of others."

"I should like to hear the warning, of course, but I do not like to have you assume the risk. Let me try it myself."

"No, no—"

"By dhe powers, no!" cried Patsy O'Glory, sternly. "Av ye do dhat same, miss, it will have to be over dhe dead body av Patsy O'Glory, now moind Oi'm telling ye."

The young woman laughed merrily.

"Very well, Patsy," she said, "it shall

be as you say. Suppose *you* oblige us by walking out there and securing the dagger."

"By all dhe powers and Brian Boru, Oi wouldn't set me wan fut on dhat same tree fur all dhe gold in dhe whole Wild West, and don't ye fureget it. Oi am no fool, aven av Oi am not as bright as some."

The whole party laughed heartily, all but Patsy himself, who seemed deadly in earnest.

"No, we cannot think of allowing you to take any such risk, Miss St. James," Cooper assured, "but you shall not be denied the pleasure of hearing the warning, if the rascal is on guard."

With a wave of the hand, at that, to brush away all further objections, the man sprang up upon the butt of the tree and advanced slowly out upon it.

The two women stood with clasped hands and apparently with bated breath as well.

"I should account the danger of falling great enough, without anything else," Miss St. James remarked.

"Yes, indeed," said her companion.

Cooper was advancing with a better showing of boldness than he would have exhibited had there been no one to look on, undoubtedly. In the presence of ladies, especially, he had to make a pretense of bravery whether he possessed the genuine article or not.

He had taken but a few steps over the chasm when a voice rung out:

"Stop! Advance at your peril! Cross the death-line, and death will be your portion, swift and sure! The death-line is the dagger before you. Heed the warning of Captain Crusher and live; disregard it, and you die."

"Goodness!" was Miss St. James's womanly exclamation. "Do hasten back again, Mr. Cooper!"

"Yes, for I have no desire to stand and argue the matter," the man answered, with a light laugh, as he turned.

The next instant the whistle of a bullet was heard, accompanied with a sharp *clip!* and a second later the gorge echoed and re-echoed with the report of a rifle.

Cooper, as white as a ghost, almost lost his balance, but recovered, and in the next second leaped to the rock, where he sunk down upon the ground for the moment completely unnerved.

The women had screamed, and the faces of the men blanched.

"Begorra, phwat was Oi afther telling yez?" cried Patsy O'Glory. "Dhat was a close call, Oi'm t'inking."

"I should say it was," said Cooper himself, removing his hat. "A couple of inches nearer and my name would have been Dennis. Just look there."

He thrust his little finger through a bullet-hole in the brim of his hat, not more than an inch from his head.

"It was a shot to kill, no doubt about that," declared the mayor.

"No question about it," Cooper agreed.

He replaced his hat, having in a measure recovered from the shock, and got up from his undignified position.

"See what you risked," chided Miss St. James. "I told you not to undertake it, but you would not heed me. I am thankful the bullet missed, for had you been killed—"

"What if I had been killed?" as she hesitated there.

"I should ever have blamed myself for it, sir."

"Nonsense! But, it missed, and a miss is as good as a mile, you know. You will not catch me venturing out there again, however, I assure you."

"No, one would think not. But, tell me," the young woman added, "why does the outlaw guard this pass across the gorge so carefully? I cannot imagine, for it certainly is not his own highway to and from his hiding-place."

"Ha! how do you know that?" demanded the mayor quickly.

"It is easily read, sir; the tree is not worn by travel."

"You reason well, miss."

"It must be because it leads direct to his place, I suppose," explained Cooper. "Maybe another passage, somewhere, is equally well guarded."

"Yes, I suppose you must be right. Well, I am ready to return, if the rest of you are. I am thoroughly satisfied, and I have something to write about this time with a vengeance."

"And I guess we are all willing to go," answered the mayor.

"But, a moment," the young woman detained them. "Could you tell me whence that shot came, men?"

"It was down in the chasm," said Cooper promptly. "I was where I could hear the report before the echoes began to resound. It seemed half-way down in the dismal hole."

"Then before I go I shall try some snap-shots in that direction."

The young woman said it as coolly as though snap-shots were an every-day pastime with her.

"Good heavens!" cried Cooper. "How will you do it? You can see down into the narrow gorge only from the tree, and we certainly will not allow you to go out there!"

"Can I not lean over the edge here?"

"No, no!" cried the mayor. "Your firing would invite a bullet, and you might come off less—"

Her merry laughter interrupted him.

"You misunderstand me," she declared.

"I mean simply snap-shots with my camera, not with firearms."

They had to laugh, one and all.

"Well, that might be done," Cooper agreed. "Still, had you not better forego the idea than take the risk? It might invite a bullet, you know."

"Be hivvins, dhere is no use y'ure talkin' against it, sor," here spoke up Patsy O'Glory. "Whin ye see dhat glitter in dhe off eye av me mistress, dhat's dhe toime she m'anes business."

"Patsy, you have too much tongue," the young woman chided. "Yes, I mean to secure a few such pictures, while I am here," she firmly added.

She unslung her instrument once more, and stepped boldly to the edge.

Her timidity, as first shown, had been overcome. There was little of fear in her movements now.

Lying down upon her side, she cautiously put out her arm over the edge of the shoulder of rock, and in her hand was a small, round mirror.

Into this she looked, steadily, moving it this way and that, and it was a matter of curiosity to those who looked on. Who, but this gifted young woman, would have thought of such a thing?

No bullet from below could reach her, and yet she had full command of the depths below.

True, her arm was exposed, but that was not a vital part.

Satisfied, presently, she drew back the glass, and with both hands held her camera over the edge and made several snaps in succession, at different angles, after which she drew back and rose to her feet.

The men of the party had been standing ready to grab her, at the slightest indication of her slipping, and the mayor and Cooper had exchanged a glance that might mean much or little. It had not been lost to the keen eyes of Patsy O'Glory, for he noted everything that was going on around him at all times.

The party set out upon their return, the young lady promising to show her pictures as soon as she had made them permanent on the plates.

CHAPTER IX.

COMSTOCK JONES OF DENVER.

AFTER the return of the party to the camp, Wat Cooper repaired with the mayor to the office of the latter.

"You can bet your life, mayor," Cooper emphatically declared, as they took seats to rest, "that I have paid my last visit to that confounded place."

"Can't blame you for that, Wat," the mayor responded. "It came pretty near to being the last visit you would pay anywhere."

"You are right. That was a shot to kill. I'd almost give my right hand to know who Captain Crusher is."

"And so would I, too, for it's getting interesting."

"What do you think of that girl?"

"I give it up."

"She's cooler than ice, and a heap deeper than one would think at first sight. And she's as keen as a razor, too."

"I'd like to see the photographs she got of Dismal Canyon, from the cliff there. What do you suppose tempted her to try that experiment?"

"She had something in mind, sure. And, the looking-glass trick, too—who would have thought of such a thing as that? And she was prepared for it, you see, as if it wasn't the first time."

"That's so."

"Do you know, mayor, I have half a suspicion."

"And what's that?"

"That this lady is the wife of Deadwood Dick."

"Whew! You don't think so, do you? What gives you that notion?"

"Well, see how she defended him. And then, too, his wife has been called Photograph Something-or-other—no, no, that's not it; she is called Kodak Kate. That's the name of the machine she uses, you know."

"Yes, now I remember it. I thought you were getting off the track, for that was the name we read in the papers about the time of a raid this Deadwood Dick made on some outlaws down there in the southwestern part of the Territory."

"Exactly. Now, do you think this can be she?"

"That's a question. I wouldn't be surprised, now that you bring it to mind. How are we going to find out?"

"Easier asked than answered, my dear mayor. I give it up. If it is the same woman, there would be no use trying to trap her into a confession of it, or anything of that sort."

"Well, it's good that we have got the suspicion anyhow."

"Yes, for we shall have to be wary that our own little game does not leak out where it can be picked up against us. We'll keep this suspicion to ourselves, and keep our eyes and ears well open for points."

"And, say, Wat—"

"Say it."

"If this woman is the person you have guessed, what about the Irishman who attends her?"

"You would ask if he can be Deadwood Dick?"

"Exactly."

"Well, now, I don't know, but from what we have seen, I should say not; that is, not if the other fellow was Dick. We saw them both together, you know, and no chance for a double dodge."

"That's so. Well, I give it up for the present. Hello! here comes your friend Hartz."

"Mighty little friendship I have for him, I can tell you," Cooper growled.

"Well, back from your trip, are you?" the sport greeted, as he entered the office.

"As you see," the mayor made response.

"What luck had you? Get a sight at your worthy Captain Crusher?"

"Not a glimpse," answered the mayor, "but Wat here got a bullet from him, or came close to getting it."

"Ha! that so?"

"Looks like it, don't it?" and Cooper showed the hole in his hat.

"Great Scott! I should say it does! But, what ever possessed you to step over the death-line?"

"I didn't."

"Didn't?"

"No."

"Then this is something, for Captain Crusher has never been known to fire until the death-line was crossed."

"Well, he did it this time, anyhow, and if it had been a little nearer it would have been the death-line for me, sure enough. I was just telling the mayor here it's my last trip there."

"Should think it would be. What did the lady think of it?"

"The cheapest way for you to find out is to go and ask her," and Cooper shut up tight as though he wanted nothing further to say to the man.

"Thank you," said Hartz. "I will do that, and I have no doubt I shall learn all about it and much more agreeably from her own lips than from any other source. By the way, mayor, I suppose that reward is still open?"

"Why, yes, certainly."

"I'm thinking about trying for it. I want to get my money to bank, but I'll be hanged if I feel safe to try it while this outlaw is at large. Think I'll get a company of twenty men or so and take a hack at Captain Crusher and his gang—if he has a gang at his back."

"That's uncertain. But, go in to win, if you want to."

"You can't look for any help from Deadwood Dick, now, and something has got to be done. You'll help, I suppose?"

"Why, certainly, in any way I can. Get your company together, and then we'll lay out a plan of action. I'm willing to do anything that will bring this outlaw to time."

"All right, I'll let you know when I'm ready."

So the sport went out and on his way, and the mayor and Cooper resumed their talk.

"What do you think about the fellow?"

the mayor asked. "Do you think he is nifty enough to tackle the job?"

"He is in talk, anyhow. If he does go for the outlaw I hope he will get his confounded head knocked off the first thing. If he don't, he and I can't dwell in the same camp much longer without coming to blows."

"And all on account of this handsome Incognita."

"No, not all, for we didn't love each other even before she came here. I'll admit that her coming hasn't made us love each other any the more."

"Well, there is this about it: If he does get on trail of Captain Crusher, he is likely to get crushed, and there will be an end of the matter so far as he is concerned. But, who can Captain Crusher be?"

"We'll find out, sooner or later."

There was deeper meaning in their words than appeared on the surface.

It needed only their looks and manner of speaking, to assure of this, had there been any one to observe.

They were still in conversation when the afternoon stage rolled into the camp, rounding up in front of the Hotel Grande and there stopping, the driver flinging aside the ribbons with a flourish.

First among the passengers to alight was a solid-looking man past the middle of life.

He was well dressed, and wore a massive cold chain across his vest, this being really the first thing to catch the eye of the observer.

He had iron-gray, close-trimmed side-

whiskers, and wore a silk cap, while a big diamond flashed and glittered on his shirt front. He had the appearance of a Western capitalist.

Not that all capitalists look alike, but there was a certain "bankerish" air about this man that stamped him as being a capitalist and financier combined.

He carried a heavy cane, and walked with the air of a man who could buy the whole camp if he wanted to.

Pausing a moment to look around, he advanced to the hotel.

"I want the best room you have got," he said to the clerk, in a pompous way; giving the desk a thump with his cane.

"All right, sir," answered the clerk, who had all the airs of a capitalist to be. "Just give us your name here, and we'll do the best we can for you."

He shoved out the autograph album of the establishment, and the capitalist took up the pen and spread his name upon the page with a splurge and flourish, as though to a great check.

"There you have it," he said.

The name he had subscribed was—

COMSTOCK JONES, DENVER.

The clerk read it aloud as he turned the register toward him again.

"That's right, young man, that's right," the stranger approved. "Comstock Jones, rancher, miner, banker, and a little of everything besides. Who are the moneyed men of your camp?"

"We haven't got any millionaires, sir."

"S'pose not; but, who comes nearest to it?"

The clerk ran over some names, chief among which were the names of Timothy Gibson and John Hartz.

"Them's the kind of men I want to fall in with, you know," the capitalist declared. "I'll have you introduce me after I get supper. That's the most important thing at present."

"Here comes Mr. Hartz now," said the clerk.

"Where?"

"The sport over there. We call him the sport."

"What does he own? One of the mines here, or something of that sort?"

"Owns this hotel, and some other places in the camp, sir. He is one of the solid men of the place."

By this time Hartz had come up, and the clerk made known the new-comer's name, and from that beginning Mr. Jones did the rest.

"Fact of the matter is, Mr. Hartz," he said, "I have come here on the lookout for a paying mine property, and if you can help me toward getting hold of what I want I'll be obliged to you."

"All right, Mr. Jones; I'll do all I can. We'll have supper, and then we'll fall in with the mayor and talk with him. I don't suppose he'll sell the Jack Mine, but there are other finds around that are worth money. Haven't any doubt but we'll be able to fix you out."

They went in to supper, still talking about the matter, and the new-comer impressed the sport with his importance. That he was a man of means was not to be doubted, and that he had come to the camp on business was pretty certain. Whether he was to be suited there or not remained to be seen. It was to the interest of Big Nug to hold him if it could.

CHAPTER X.

COOPER'S SUSPICION ALLAYED.

AFTER supper it was no trouble to find the mayor, and Mr. Jones was introduced.

The trio repaired to the mayor's office, where, over the smoke of some fine cigars, they talked "mining" to their full content.

It was shown that the Jack Mine was not for sale, but it did not appear that it would not be sold if the price offered came up high enough. Nothing was settled upon.

"By the way, I was warned that I had better not come here," Mr. Jones made remark, when they had talked out on mines.

"Warned not to come here?" asked the mayor, in some surprise.

"Yes."

"Who warned you?"

"I don't know who; it was at a station where I stopped on the way."

"That is strange," observed Hartz. "That is, unless some rival concern wanted to lead you off elsewhere."

"No, no; it was nothing like that; I was told there is an outlaw on the road here, and that it is hardly safe for any man to travel with money in his pocket, or even a watch."

"Oh! that's the old bugaboo about Captain Crusher."

"Then there's some truth in it?"

"Well, yes, we had an outlaw here, but he hasn't been seen lately."

"Lucky for me, then, for I have a considerable sum of the national lucre in my clothes. I mention this privately, of course."

"No harm done," the mayor assured, at that. "I have offered a reward for the fellow, and it seems to have frightened him off. At any rate, it is some time now since he has done anything around here."

"But, there is danger that he will come, perhaps?"

"Well, we are on guard against him as well as possible, sir. It will not be easy for us to be tricked by him."

"But, how do you manage about shipping your stuff? Can you get it out and away safely?"

"Oh! it has been done; we don't anticipate much trouble in *that* direction, any longer."

"Because, if I have to come and fight against road-agents, it's a poor inducement for me to invest here. But, I'd make short work of your Captain Crusher, you can just bet."

On the following morning there was excitement in the camp.

Captain Crusher had been there, and the treasure of the Jack Mine had been once again despoiled.

Nor, was this all. Some of the business places of the camp had been entered, and a considerable amount of money taken. The hotel, however, had been spared on this occasion.

The mayor raved like a crazy man.

He had been the first to discover that the visitation had been made, or rather some of his men had first found it out and told him.

The guardsmen at the office of the company, two of them, had been overcome and bound, and the door forced and all the treasure carried away, though how or where could not be guessed.

A note had been found in the empty treasure safe, signed by Captain Crusher, bidding defiance to the whole camp and to Deadwood Dick.

"I tell you this thing has gone far enough!" raved the mayor. "We are not going to stand it any longer! Something has got to be done, and that right away quick."

"Ha! your robber has been heard from, has he?" said Comstock Jones. "I guess that party who warned me wasn't far wrong, after all. Think I'll hold on about investing until this fellow is caged. And if you can't cage him it is strange. Seems to me a whole camp ought to catch one man."

"How would you do it?" demanded the angered mayor.

"How would I do it? Well, that's not a question to be answered in a second, and yet I think it might be, too. I'm of the

mind that I'd employ a first-class detective."

"Oh, you are, eh? And how would you put him to work without something for him to work on? Tell us that, if you can."

"A first-class detective would find his own clues, sir. Did you ever hear of Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

The mayor glanced at the man sharply.

"Yes, what of him?"

"I have heard of him, that's all, and I understand he has done work of this kind. I know he has been to Denver and performed some services there."

"Have you ever seen him?" asked Hartz.

"Yes, sir."

"Too bad you could not have been here the other day, then."

"Why so? Was Deadwood Dick here? I was going to say, if the matter was mine I would hire some such man to run the fellow down."

"If he could do it," snapped the mayor.

"In my mind this Deadwood Dick is no better himself, or very little better. Any man that would threaten a camp as he has threatened this is not to be trusted."

"Threatened you?"

"Yes; and, by the great, this robbery has followed pretty close on that threat of his, too!"

"Then he was here?" the capitalist questioned again.

"Yes, and he got a pretty warm reception, too," Hartz explained. "He was mistaken for the outlaw, by a blunder, and came near to being hanged. Might have been hanged had it not been for a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes; the lady you saw at breakfast this morning."

The particulars were given.

All this, however, did not help the present case, and the mayor and the others who had been despoiled were wild for revenge upon the author of their misfortunes. All they asked was to lay hands on him once.

The mayor went around tearing down his former notices of reward, and in the place of each put up a new one, raising the price another thousand.

In this he was assisted by the others who had been robbed.

This was quite a raise, two thousand from five hundred, and the camp was eager to see the outlaw taken.

Groups of men stood around the posters, discussing the situation and calculating their chances for taking the outlaw if they should undertake it. Every man of them was eager enough to win the reward, but not so willing to assume the risks.

Said one man:

"'Et would be all a feller's life is worth to go up thar to whar ther death-dagger is on the tree, and nobody knows whar else ter strike ther trail."

And that was where the whole matter hinged.

While this was going on, here and there about, Wat Cooper had been forming the acquaintance of the capitalist.

"By the way," he remarked, "I hear you have seen the man called Deadwood Dick, the fellow who was here the other night, or who, at any rate, claimed to be the great detective."

"Yes, I have seen him, sir."

"Ever seen his wife?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ha! that's good; of course you would know her if you should meet her again. Do you think you would?"

"I certainly think I should, sir."

"Then you are just the man I wanted to find. There is a woman here at the hotel whom I rather suspect of being Mrs. Dick Bristol."

"Ha! is that so? Then she could no doubt tell you where to find her husband, and he could easily be got hold of for the work of

hunting down this Captain Crusher. Why don't you try it?"

Cooper smiled.

"That's where the thing hinges," he said. "We are not sure it is she. And, it is only a private suspicion anyhow; we have not mentioned it to any one."

"Then you are not the only one that holds it?"

"No; the mayor is of the same mind. But, this is private; don't let on that I have mentioned it to you. What I was coming at was this: Will you take a look at the woman in question and see whether it's the one or not?"

"Anything to oblige, sir. Point her out to me."

"Well, there she is, on the piazza of the hotel now. You'd know her anywhere by that Irishman behind her chair. He seldom leaves her a moment."

"That woman? Why, she's only a young lady, isn't she?"

"I don't know how old or how young she is; all I want to know is whether she is the wife of Deadwood Dick?"

"Well, let's walk by there and I'll tell you."

So they sauntered down past the hotel, Cooper bowing to the lady as they passed, and when they had got a little distance beyond, Cooper demanded:

"What do you say?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, my friend," was the reply, "but I'm obliged to tell you this woman isn't the person you suspect."

"That settles it, then."

"Will you tell me what led you think it was the wife of the detective?"

"Yes; as you have done me the favor I can't refuse that," and Cooper thereupon gave briefly the particulars.

"Do you know," Mr. Jones confessed, "you have quite alarmed me, taking it all in all. I have a considerable boodle with me, and I'm afraid to venture away from here with it."

"No one will know you have got it, though, unless you go around telling about it, sir."

"Oh, I tell only men to be trusted, like you, the mayor, and one or two others of such responsibility. Can't be any harm in that."

"No; but in matters of this sort the stiller one keeps the better. Now, however, the camp is getting worked up about the outlaw, and the mayor's reward may be the means of scaring the fellow off for good."

"Has this outlaw never been seen?"

"Very seldom, and then not his face, sir."

"Well, I hope they'll get him. If they don't I believe I'll take a hand in it myself for my own safety. I have money, even if I haven't youth and ability to join in the active work. This fellow must be brought to the end of his rope, and Comstock Jones says so."

CHAPTER XI.

SOME PRETTY PLOTS SHOWN.

LATER ON, Cooper made it his business to get hold of the mayor aside.

He was eager to apprise him of the point he had made regarding their suspicion against Miss St. James.

"Well, I'm not surprised," the mayor said when he had heard the story. "It don't look reasonable, when you come to look into it, that's the fact."

"There's another thing, mayor."

"What's that?"

"The woman has been talking to that boy of yours."

"The deuce she has!"

"Yes; I saw them together, but couldn't get near enough to hear what was said between them."

"What do you suppose she wanted with him?"

"I give it up; thought I'd put you onto it, that was all."

"And that's right. I'll get hold of the cub and get it out of him or I'll kill him."

"He's afraid of you. Hadn't I better take it in hand for you? Maybe I can draw him out even better than you can yourself."

"You can try it if you want to."

"All right, I will. I am curious to know about her, and want to pick up every point I can. If she is single, as she gives out, Hartz has got to hustle to win her ahead of me."

"If you mean business you will have to fight for her, I'm betting."

"Nothing would please me better than that. I could do Hartz up, I am sure, and then the field would be mine, for there's not likely to be another rival."

"And if you got the worst of it—"

"Then the shoe would be on the other foot, that would be all the difference, and I wouldn't know anything about it anyhow; and what we don't know never grieves us, don't you see?"

If Timothy Gibson had a boy, the camp of Big Nug did not know it.

No one there thought the mayor had ever been married, but could the busybodies have overheard this talk there would have been food for gossip.

When Cooper took his leave he sauntered off up the gulch.

Finally he stopped at the shanty of a miner, about the worst looking den in the whole camp.

An old woman just outside the door, sitting on a section of a log—with which the shanty was furnished in lieu of chairs, was smoking a pipe.

"Hello, Mother Snyder," Cooper greeted.

"Waal, what der you want hyer?" the old woman demanded, sharply.

"Where's Trip?"

"He's inside thar doin' dishes, thar's whar! Don't s'pose I'd be doin' 'em an' a lazy hulk like him around, do ye?"

"Not a bit of it. But, can't you spare him a little while? I want a boy, an' he'll just suit me. I'll pay you; you needn't let Josh know anything about it, and you'll have that much the more for bitters."

"Waal, I don't mind, Mister Cooper, seein' it's you."

"Here's something, then. Send the boy out."

The woman rose and made her way unsteadily into the shanty, showing that she was even then none too steady on her foundation.

Her voice was heard for a few moments, in rather loud and harsh talk, and then a boy came out at the front door in haste.

This was Trip—or, Timothy Gibson's boy.

He looked around, and seeing Cooper a little distance off—for he had strolled slowly away, ran to him.

The boy was not a bad-looking lad of twelve, but was so ragged that he had barely clothing enough on him to hide his nakedness. His face was shockingly dirty, but his hands, just out of the dishwater, were clean enough.

"You want me?" he asked.

"Yes; come along with me, my lad," Cooper answered. "I want to talk with you a little, that is all."

He took the little fellow—he was a little fellow, being under size for one of his age—by the hand and led him away further up the gulch.

This seemed a surprise to the lad, and he held back.

He had evidently expected the direction would be toward the center of the camp, where he would be required to do some work.

"You ain't goin' ter whale me, be ye?" he asked.

"Why, no, of course not!" Cooper assured. "What puts *that* into your head?"

"I thought mebbly Josh had got ye to knock me around, bein' as he can't git home till the whistle blows."

"Oh, no; I only want to talk with you. But, why should he want to knock you around, as you call it? What have you been doing?"

"Ain't been doin' nothin', only a lady gave me some money and old Mom Snyder got her claws onter it, and I thought mebbly Josh had found it out and wanted me clubbed fer not fetchin' et to him."

"Oh, no; nothing of the sort; so don't be alarmed. Don't you ever have any money of your own, Trip?"

"Money? No; wouldn't know what ter do with et."

"Well, there's no chance for a boy to spend money here, that's true, but here is a bit for you all the same. Put it in your pocket; it's your very own."

The lad took it as he might have taken a stone, or a nail, and put it in his pocket.

"What did the lady give you money for?" Cooper now asked.

"I don't know; she talked to me, an' then she gev me the money an' said be a good boy."

"What did she talk about?"

"Nothin' much."

"She must have said something, though."

"Well, she wanted to know what me name was, an' I told her Trip, and then she wanted ter know Trip what? I told her jest Trip an' nothin' more to et."

"And then what did she say?"

"She wanted ter know ef I hadn't never had any other name, an' I told her no; an' then she wanted ter know who my mom an' dad was, an' I told her Josh Snyder an' mom. An' then she said I didn't look like 'em."

"I don't see how she could tell who you looked like for dirt."

"Well, she said so, anyhow."

"And what else did she talk about?"

"She asked me if I ever knowed anybody by name of Baker, an' I told her I didn't. An' then she wanted to know a good deal more, I don't remember half of et. But, what do you want o' me, Mister Cooper?"

"Just want to talk with you, that's all. Did the lady ask you if you had always lived with Mom Snyder?"

"Yes, she wanted ter know that, too."

"And what did you tell her?"

"Told her yes."

"And then she wanted to know if you was sure of it?"

"Why, how der you know 'bout et? You wasn't thar, was ye, Mister Cooper? I know ye wasn't, though."

"No, I wasn't there; I'm only guessing at it. What did you tell her when she asked if you was sure of it? Did you tell her yes to that, too?"

"Yes, that's what I done."

"And then she wanted to know if you didn't remember any other home at all, I suppose. And maybe she wanted you to think hard, just as hard as ever you could, and then what did you say?"

The lad was looking at the man in greatest surprise.

"Somebody's been tellin' ye," he declared.

"No, I'm only guessing. But, what did you tell her about that? Did you tell her you remembered some other place besides Mom Snyder's?"

"Yes, I had ter tell her true, ye know. I told her I did sort o' remember a different place, where everything was nice, but that was only like a dream now. And she wanted ter know ef they used ter call me Harry."

"Harry, eh?"

"Yes; an' I've been thinkin' a heap about that ever sence, fer et does seem like I uster know somebody named Harry."

"And that was all she said?"

"Oh, no; she said a pile, but I fergit et."

"Well, that's all you can tell me, then, so we'll go back. But, see here, my boy."

"What is et?"

"If she talks with you again don't let on that anybody else has been asking you questions."

"Not even if she asks me?"

"No; you can tell her somethin' else. And don't have too much to say to her anyhow, for she's as likely as not to tell Josh something about you and get you a whaling."

They sauntered back again, and dropping the boy at the Snyder shanty Cooper hurried on to the mayor's office to report.

"Well, here's fun afoot," he announced.

"Whst is it?"

"This woman is bound to learn all she can about that kid of yours, and the boy has been telling all he could."

From that he went on to give the particulars.

The mayor listened to the end, wonderingly, and finally broke out:

"Who in the deuce can she be? I'll swear I never saw her before in my life, and don't know a thing about her."

"But, it's plain that she's after your scalp, Timothy, and the best thing to do is to get that boy out of her reach. You can hire the Snyders to move away between suns."

"That's so, and that's what I'll do, too. I'd have killed the rat long ago, but that's going against nature, you know. Yes, I'll see them and get them out of the place before to-morrow's sun is up, and that will settle the whole business, so far as the kid goes."

"But it don't settle the woman."

"I'll leave you to do that. If you want her, why the dickens don't you take her and marry her?"

"You seem to forget that she will have something to say about *that*, and that maybe she wouldn't agree with me on the point."

"And then, there's Hartz, too. If you allow him to oust you you are a greater clam than I ever took you to be, Wat. Go in and win, says I."

"Will you stand by me, if I go in to win whether she is willing or not?"

"Yes, I'll stand by you. If you want her, take her."

CHAPTER XII.

STRAWS TO INDICATE THE WIND.

THERE was a surprise in store for Mayor Gibson before that day closed.

It was drawing toward night when he purposely fell in with Josh Snyder, and had he noticed, he might have seen that Josh was as eager to fall in with him.

"I was looking for you, Josh," he said at once. "Come, walk along here and I will tell you what I want. I'm going to pay you to get out of here to-night, you and the old woman and the boy, and—"

"Let me say onct, fore ye go any furdur," the old man broke in. "I was on ther look-out fer you ter ask ef ye knowed anything about that 'ar kid. Me an' ther old woman can't find him nowhars, and we don't know what's become of him. Ain't been ter home ther hull a'ernoon."

"The dickens you say! What's become of him?"

"Ain't that jest what I said I don't know? That's what I wanted ter ask you. Ain't you seen him?"

"Neither hide nor hair. I have a nction I know where to begin to look for him, though, and I'll see if I can't bring him to light. You go home and get ready to move, and if I get hold of him I'll hand him over to you."

"But, whar am I goin' ter move to?"

"Oh, strike out for a straight fifty miles at least, and drop into some camp under another name."

"How much is thar in et fer movin' 'spenses?"

"A hundred dollars."

"I move."

And without further parley Mr. Snyder set out for home to make ready.

The mayor made haste to fall in with Wat Cooper, who seemed to be his right-hand man in all cases of doubt.

"Well, did you make it all right?" Wat asked.

"Confound it, no," the snarl for answer.

"It is all wrong."

"What's up?"

"The kid is missing."

"Whew! That was done quicker than we would have dreamed of."

"You are right; and now, the next thing is to find him, and I want you to help me."

"I'm yours to command. How'll we begin at it?"

"By going to see that woman, confound her!"

"Come right along."

They directed their steps to the hotel at once, where the lady was found on the piazza in her accustomed place.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," she cheerfully greeted them, "though it is getting almost late enough to say evening. Can't I have the pleasure of your company a little while?"

"The very thing we have come to offer," responded Cooper. "We have called on a matter of business, however."

"Business?" with some surprise.

"Yes," said the mayor. "Not that it amounts to very much, but you may be able to help me out a little. I requested Mr. Cooper to come with me, as he knows more about the matter than I do myself."

"What is it, Mr. Gibson? Nothing about that unpleasant affair of the other night, I hope."

"Oh, no, nothing about that; in fact, nothing serious anyhow. The fact of the matter is, Josh Snyder, one of our citizens here, has lost his boy—"

"Ah! and you want me to visit the family to sympathize with the parents, or something of that kind? Why, I'll go, Mr. Gibson, most willingly. You need not have hesitated—"

"No, no," the mayor interrupted, as soon as he could get command of his breath to say anything, for she had taken it away from him. "The boy is missing—gone, not dead; and as you have been seen talking with him we thought possibly you might be able to give us a clue."

"Oh! that dirty little fellow I was talking with this morning?"

"Yes, can you imagine where he is?"

"I cannot say, sir."

"He told his parents about your asking him a great many questions, and as they did not like to come to you themselves they asked me to come in their stead. Was there nothing let fall that would give you an idea where he may have gone?"

"Nothing whatever. It is true that I did ply the little fellow with numerous questions, but there was nothing in them that could in any way explain his whereabouts now."

"Then that is all we can ask, Miss St. James, and we are sorry for having troubled you at all."

"Do not mention it, pray."

There was a momentary awkward pause.

"Is there anything I can do?" she sweetly asked. "If so, do not hesitate to mention it."

"N-no, there is nothing," the mayor answered. "Sorry had to trouble you, am sure. Going along with me, Cooper?"

The mayor was a little confused, and showed it.

"No, I will remain, if you will excuse me, mayor," Cooper responded. "I desire to talk a little while with Miss St.

James, with her permission. I will see you later after supper."

"All right."

So the mayor went on his way and Cooper remained.

"How long have you been in the West, Miss St. James?" Cooper then inquired.

"Oh, a considerable time, Mr. Cooper," was the gracious response. "Several months at least."

"Then you have been here amply long to learn how brief we are in the matter of business, of course. You know we use few words but right to the point."

"Yes, I have found it so."

"And we are the same in matters of sentiment."

"Yes?"

"Exactly. Will you permit me to speak out before your man here?"

"Patsy has no ears; say whatever you have a mind to, sir. I hope it is not sentiment, however."

"I'll call it business, for that is what I mean. Will you be my wife, Miss St. James? Take a minute to think it over and then give me your decision."

"You are less generous than Mr. Hartz, sir," laughing.

Cooper scowled.

"What about him?"

"He has given me a whole day in which to answer the same question, and I have not answered it yet."

"It ought to be easy, then, for you to answer me off-hand."

"And why?"

"Because, you ought to know by this time whether or not you are going to entertain his proposition favorably."

"I would prefer not to answer either of you—in truth, I wish neither had put the embarrassing question."

"Which is equivalent to a negative. But, let me have it in so many words and so know my fate. I had rather know a prize is beyond reach, than to be ever looking hopefully toward it."

"You are philosophical about it, anyhow. The explanation is, because if I refuse, then you will press for a reason."

"I promise you I will not."

"Very well, then here is your answer: I cannot marry you, Mr. Cooper."

Cooper rose, his face dark and his eyes full of sullen fire, and lifting his hat, said:

"Thank you, Miss St. James. May I ask one more question?"

"I suppose I cannot hinder you."

"Are you going to give the same answer to Hartz?"

"It would be unfair to let another have my decision before I make it known to him, sir."

"Well, I can answer for him: you are not going to wed him! If I cannot possess you, neither shall he—I swear it!"

"Oh! this is horrible of you, Mr. Cooper!"

"I cannot help it; I mean it."

"And what shall you do?"

"Wait and see."

He strode away, and was quickly lost to sight.

The young woman turned immediately to her servant, saying:

"Patsy, you have heard and understand; go at once and put Mr. Hartz on his guard, in few words."

"Yis, ma'm."

The Irishman was off at once, and the lady entered the house.

He evidently knew pretty near where to find the sport, for he went around to the rear of Hartz's gaming place and entered.

The sport was there, in a rear room, talking with Comstock Jones, with whom he appeared to have struck up quite a friendly acquaintance and with whom he was discussing Captain Crusher.

"Begorra, Oi have a wurred for ye, sport!" Patsy announced, bluntly.

"Whom from?" the sport asked.

"Me missus, sure."

"Ah! Well, step this way and let me hear it."

He drew the Irishman a little aside, and then bade him speak out.

"Begorra, dhe same is just dhis," the Irishman explained, in tone plenty loud enough for the ears of the capitalist too: "Me missus sinds me to tell ye to have y'ure-top eye open fur Misther Cooper."

"Wat Cooper?"

"Dhat's dhe gossoon she m'anes, sor."

"And what is in the wind? What is the trouble, Patsy?"

"Be hivvins, he has asked me missus to marry him, and whin she tould him no, he swore dhat nayther should you, and he's gone to sharpen up his sword to be afther shootin' at ye."

"Ha! that is his game, is it? I'll be ready for him."

"Dhe which same she tould me to tell ye, sor."

And with that and a duck of the head, Patsy O'Glory took his leave as abruptly as he had entered.

"I suppose you heard what the fellow said, Mr. Jones?" the sport asked of his visitor.

"Yes, I heard; and if you want a second in your fight—don't call on me. Not that I wouldn't oblige a friend if I had to, but it is against my principles. The fact of the matter is, I'm afraid of bullets—mortally afraid of 'em!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PROBING THE SECRET.

It was night, and the shoulder of rock that overlooked Dismal Canyon was veiled in darkness.

By the light of the stars the trees that lay across the chasm could be seen in outlines against the inky blackness of the depths, but that was all.

The towering peaks all around made the spot darker than it otherwise would have been, and a person leaning back against the rocky wall could not be seen, even from a short distance.

A man was there, one who claims our attention for a space.

He had been there for some time, as motionless as the rock itself, almost, patiently waiting.

The hour was late, no one joined him, nothing had happened to disturb the stillness of the night, and one might have come to the conclusion, finally, that what he waited for was time.

Such a guess would have been correct.

At last he moved.

Stepping forward as silently as a shadow, he placed a foot upon the trunk of the fallen tree.

He waited a moment, then got upon it, and balancing himself, began the dangerous task of advancing out and across the terrible depth in the darkness, with nerve like steel.

Dark as it was, however, and silently as he moved, he had taken but a few steps when he was challenged.

"Stop!" came the word of warning. "Advance at your peril! Cross the death-line, and death will be your portion, swift and sure! Heed the warning of Captain Crusher and live; disregard it, and you die."

The man, however, did not pause, but kept straight on, crossed the place where the dagger marked the death-line, and pressed forward to gain the other side as quickly as he could.

He had taken but a few steps more when he saw the flash of a rifle in the depths below, a bullet whistled harmlessly behind him, and in the next moment the report was heard, causing the grim chasm to echo again and again.

Another shot, and still another, and then all was still.

A step or two more, and the man had crossed the dangerous footway in safety, and now stood between two walls of rock in which the top of the dead tree lay.

On that side was no shoulder of rock, as on the opposite, but the tree lay all the more securely fastened in this narrow pass that had the appearance of having been carved for no other purpose.

"Well, here I am in spite of the outlaw and everything else, and alive, too. But, I am not safe, for they know somebody has crossed the forbidden line and will no doubt be here as soon as possible to investigate. I suspect the game, now, and how it is carried on."

He laughed lightly to himself.

"But, I must look out for myself," he said seriously enough. "They may be here in a moment, and if they find what has been done they will make it interesting for me, no doubt. But, where am I to hide? I am a cat in a strange garret, here, true enough. I must be mighty cautious how I proceed, or I may find myself walking on nothing."

Feeling his way, he advanced along the passage till it opened upon a plateau.

"Ha! this is better," he spoke in whisper. "Now to find a spot where I can spend the remainder of the night in safety, and then to continue the rest of my investigation by daylight. If I do not get crushed, I think I'll be able to solve the mystery of this Captain Crusher and bring him to account for his misdeeds. It will surprise them when I spring my trap, I imagine. They will find Deadwood Dick's declaration was not idle."

Deadwood Dick, Junior, it was, in a disguise and armed to the teeth. It was he, the redoubtable Richard, not after his foes.

While he stood there, on the edge of the plateau, studying the situation for a moment, a light far down the rugged mountain-side caught his eye, and he watched it.

"Coming this way, as I live," he told himself. "Well, it will serve a good purpose, if I can escape discovery. If it comes here, it will show me the trail down when it returns, and I may be able to get through my work to-night without having to take daylight for it. I hope it will turn out so."

He looked to his weapons, well knowing that a fight there on the cliff might be an event of the near future.

That done, he began to explore around as well as he could without making a light, a thing he did not dare do since that would reveal the presence of some one on the danger side of the death-line, and would lead to a thorough search.

He made the tour of the cliff, or plateau, and found there were at least three means of escape from it, but none of which it was prudent for him to take yet, not knowing which way his foes would approach. What he needed was a place of concealment there on the spot.

He had been keeping watch of the approaching light, too, off and on, and it was now considerably nearer than when he had first noted it.

It appeared to be approaching the plateau on the right.

At one point Dick discovered a spot where it was possible to scale the wall which backed the plateau, and he looked above as well as he could in the dim light.

There seemed to be a ledge some feet up, but he could not be sure of this without climbing up to see, and maybe not then without a light.

He made the attempt to climb, but with greatest caution, knowing that to slip meant death.

And it needed all his care, for it was harder than it had looked to be, but after a few minutes of hard work he reached what proved to be a very narrow ledge, or shelf.

"Just the place, if they don't explore it," he said to himself. "If they do, it may prove a death-trap instead of a place of refuge."

Lying down at full length, with a revolver ready in hand, he waited.

Here he could not see the light, or at any rate he did not see it again, but that was because it did not exist.

Presently three men made their appearance upon the plateau, one from each of the ways Dick had found, and they came in darkness, having no light with them, moving as silently as shadows.

They spoke not, but passed through the narrow pass that led to the dead tree spanning Dismal Canyon.

Some moments passed, during which Dick did not hear a sound out of them.

Then finally they came back, now with less caution, and as they came out this time upon the plateau one of the party lighted up the scene with the glare of a bull's-eye.

Deadwood Dick drew quickly back so as not to be seen.

He noted the rays of the lantern as the light was flashed this way and that, and presently they flashed up over the shelf he was on.

"Well, thar ain't nothin' hyer," a man then spoke.

"So et seems," another agreed. "Et's sartain somethin' was on ther tree, though, all ther same."

"Yes, we cannot be mistaken in that part of it," the third of the party made remark, a voice Dick recognized. "Still, it may have been some animal. It don't take much weight to give the alarm, you know."

"And et must hev run back ther way et kem, hey?"

"Maybe so, maybe not; that is nothing. If it was a man, it is pretty certain he did not come this way, or we would have met him. He could not escape us, coming by all the trails leading here, as he did from the point where they branched off. We may as well go back."

Here was information for Dick.

All the ways of escape from the plateau were one, after all, since they were but branches of a main trail.

"Et's just possible one of the shots tumbled the chap off'n ther tree," one of the three suggested.

"It is hardly probable, firing in the dark like that, and yet it may be as you say. We can learn that in the morning, for we'll know where to find him."

"Ha! ha! You bet we wull!"

"Folks will begin ter think Captain Crusher is a holy terror, after awhile, I'm thinkin'."

"And isn't he? Folks don't know him yet."

"What'll you do, though, boss, when Captain Crusher is ketched, ef he ever is, an' they hang him?"

"We'll have to go out of business, I suppose, seeing that we are living on his reputation now. But, time enough to think of that when the emergency comes."

"I s'pose so."

There was further discussion, when it was decided that the alarm had not been significant after all, and they set forth upon their return.

"As I thought," Deadwood Dick said then to himself. "There are two Captain Crushers instead of one. The game is in my own hands, now, if nothing slips. I'll get a sweet revenge upon the camp of Big Nug."

As soon as the men were gone Dick proceeded to get down from his airy perch, using even more care and caution than before, if possible.

He reached the main plateau in safety, and proceeded at once to follow the men adown the rugged trail.

He had to move in darkness, but he knew the way must be tolerably safe, and he remained far enough in the rear of the others to insure little danger of his being heard.

Now and then he could see the flashing of the light ahead, and by this means kept himself straight.

At last, after a pretty severe descent, the end was reached.

It was at the bottom of a tiny but pleasant gulch pocket, where a single cabin close under the overhanging rocks sent forth a welcome gleam of light.

A light from a window is nearly always thus spoken of, but it would have been anything but a welcome one for Deadwood Dick had he presented himself there, although his reception would have been undoubtedly warm enough.

The men entered the cabin, or shanty—as it more properly was, and Dick remained at the lower end of the trail to await further developments.

These soon came.

After a little delay in the cabin the men came forth again, and one was talking.

It was the chief, whose voice Dick had recognized.

"I'll drop out and see the guard," he said, "and then get back again to Big Nug. Take mighty good care of our secret till I can see you again."

"You bet we wull!" was the response, and with that they parted, one setting forth up the gulch while the others returned to the cabin and closed the door after them.

Needless to say, Deadwood Dick followed the one.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOUBLE TRAGEDY.

DICK found it necessary now to use more caution than before, since a man walking alone made less noise than when in company with two others, and there was more danger of detection.

Before, too, the men had talked more or less,

and now even that slight advantage was denied the daring detective.

Nevertheless, he pushed forward boldly and determinedly.

If it had disadvantages, however, it had corresponding advantages. There was less danger, in a fight, against one man than against three.

Dick now followed closer than before. An experienced shadower, he had, too, the courage of a lion, and he could not afford to run the risk of losing his man. Now was to be learned the way to Big Nug.

Only a little distance up the gulch the man went, when he turned abruptly into a low narrow tunnel.

Whether it was natural or made Dick could not tell, but that did not matter.

The suspect carried the bull's-eye, and by the light of this Dick had no trouble to keep him in sight.

The tunnel was short, and came out abruptly upon a shelf of rock in the inky blackness of what Dick knew to be Dismal Canyon, and here on this ledge stood the smallest shanty imaginable.

Dick heard the man call to some one, and by the light of the bull's-eye saw another man come out of the mere box, a rifle in his grasp.

"I find you wide awake," the chief observed.

"Never found me any other way, did ye?" was the response.

"No, that's so. How soon after the alarm did you fire? Soon enough to fetch a man by daylight."

"Wull, I should say so. Ther 'larm hadn't no sooner sounded 'n I was peggin' away, soon's I giv ther warnin', 'cordin' to ther rule. Did ye find anybody up thar, cap'n?"

"Not a soul!"

"Proof that I skart him back, then. You needn't be skart o' anybody gettin' over when I'm on guard."

"Well, be watchful, and let no one cross till I come again. We're going to figure on getting out of here soon, for there is danger rising. I'm going back to Big Nug now."

Dick waited to hear no more, knowing discovery would follow if he did, but got out of the tunnel as quickly and silently as he could.

He was none too soon, for about the time he emerged from the other end into the gulch, the man with the lantern set out upon his return, and Dick had to step lively to hide.

A convenient place was found, behind some bushes, and there Dick squatted till the man had come out and gone on his way up the gulch.

"The silent shadower followed as before."

At the end of the gulch it narrowed into the narrowest of canyons, and ere long that closed in overhead and became a cavern.

It was no surprise to Dick. He had seen so many of these fantastic freaks of Nature in the mountain fastnesses of the West that nothing of the kind could surprise him.

The man pushed straight on, with his light thrown ahead, and Dick steadily following. If the man should turn and cast the light behind him, discovery would be a certainty, but Dick had a weapon in hand and was ready for such an emergency.

No need to tell of the trip in detail; it was finally accomplished.

On one side of the cavern the man came at last to a ladder, where he stopped and began to ascend, and at the top he simply lifted a trap-door and was gone, the door closing after him with a clang.

"Well, that's the end of the performance, and the curtain is down," said the redoubtable Richard to himself. "And here am I in the dark. Well, I'll wait a few moments and then climb the ladder, and if progress is barred there will be only one thing for me to do."

That one thing was, to go back the way he had come.

Waiting till his suspect had time to get further away, he ascended the ladder to the top and tried the door.

It was open, and lifting it, Dick climbed silently out as the other had done, but shutting the trap after him a great deal more silently, and that much accomplished he stopped to listen.

He heard some one walking on a floor, high overhead.

"Under a building," he told himself, "and the chances are it's in the heart of Big Nug, too."

Lighting a match Dick looked around.

He was in what appeared to be a cellar, but it was deeper and less regularly cut out. It was, he rightly guessed, a part of the cavern below.

Here was another ladder, with a trap over-

head again, and when the match had gone out Dick mounted the ladder as he had the first and tried this door. It, too, was unfastened, and he could easily open it.

Lifting it with caution till he made sure there was no light above, he opened it wide and got out.

When he had closed it he listened again, and hearing nothing, struck another match.

He was now in a cellar proper, with a floor overhead.

In one corner was a flight of steps leading up to a door, now closed. Dick had good reason to think he was back again in the camp.

To ascend the stairs and try the door would be hardly safe, for the man he was after was undoubtedly in the room above, or some room of the building, and he was likely to be discovered.

Lighting other matches, he explored the cellar.

In a few minutes he made a discovery that delighted him, and one which he proceeded to take advantage of immediately.

At one end were doors opening outward, but hooked inside, and slipping the hook it was the easiest thing in the world for Dick to raise one of the doors silently and step out into the open air.

He was back again in Big Nug, true enough!

"Here we are again," he told himself. "And now what building is this? Hal! it is Hartz's gaming place, as I thought. The secret is out, my gay Captain Crusher, and if there isn't some crushing here before long it will be no fault of mine, I assure you."

All that evening, there at Big Nug, Wat Cooper had been busily engaged looking for John Hartz.

He had resolved upon forcing him into a fight, on account of the young lady, Miss St. James, but he was not to be found.

And, too, Timothy Gibson and his man Snyder were eagerly searching for the missing boy, Trip, but their search was a fruitless one, for the lad was gone.

The capitalist, Comstock Jones, too, had disappeared early in the evening and nothing had since been seen of him. But, then, nothing was thought of that, and it was believed that he and Hartz were together.

They had been seen much in each other's company, was what gave rise to this idea.

On the following morning, however, all these missing ones, save alone the boy, were in their accustomed places.

It was shortly after breakfast, when Hartz made his appearance on the street, that Wat Cooper stepped up to him and slapped his face smartly.

With an oath, and flushed with rage, Hartz sprung back and whipped out a revolver, but Cooper had been as quick and had him already covered with one of his own, and now he cried:

"Come out to the middle of the street here, you dog, and we'll back away ten paces and let drive!"

"Yes, and let drive to kill, too!" Hartz savagely declared. "I'll give you a lesson you won't forget, for that slap in the face. No man can do that to me, and live afterward."

"Bah! let's have deeds, not words!"

"I'll give you bullets."

They had already reached the middle of the street, and now they backed apart, each keeping his eyes fixed upon the other.

Each had revolver ready, and the moment they had taken the required number of steps backward, for neither took advantage, they fired together as almost one weapon.

Hartz was unharmed, but Cooper threw up his arms and fell to the ground, a dead man before he touched the earth.

The bullet of his antagonist had pierced the center of his forehead.

"Is anybody else eager to slap my face?" the sport coolly asked, as he returned his weapon to his pocket.

A crowd was gathering rapidly, shouting men running from every direction toward the scene, and all in the hotel hurried forth to learn what was the excitement.

Miss St. James and her servant were among those who came out.

So was Comstock Jones.

The situation told its own story. Wat Cooper motionless on the ground, and John Hartz just leaving the position he had occupied.

"What has happened?" cried Miss St. James, in evident distress.

"Just what you warned me against," answered Hartz, lifting his hat to her.

"Then he sought a fight with you?"

"And got it."

Without another word the young woman turned and entered the house, leaving the sport to stare after her in amazement.

He could not understand this action on her part. He could not read her woman's heart had been touched keenly, since she held herself in a measure responsible for this death.

Before he had taken his eyes from the door by which the woman had disappeared, a shot was heard and a bullet clipped close by his head.

Instantly he sprung around, his hand on a weapon, to learn whence the shot had come, and to his surprise a woman was advancing upon him from the opposite side of the street, and as he looked she fired again!

He knew her at sight, a young woman who had loved Cooper but she had never been able to secure his love in response.

Her second bullet was closer than the first, and still she came on, preparing to fire again.

"Stop!" the sport ordered. "Another step, and, woman though you are, you will force me to protect my life. Stop!"

Her answer was another shot, and this time the bullet went through his hat a little above his head, and without giving her time to shoot again the man fired and she fell to the ground with a groan.

Then such a howl as went up from the now excited crowd!

CHAPTER XV.

EXPECTATIONS AROUSED.

THE mind and passion of a crowd change with every passing event, and now all who had been friends of the sport only a moment before were loud in their demand that he should be hanged.

"Up with him!" was the shout. "He's shot a woman!"

And the crowd advanced angrily upon him, as if to carry out their design with no waste of time.

"Back!" the sport cried. "Back! every man of you! Didn't I have to do it to save my own life? I warned her, but she would not stop."

"Yes, but it was a woman!"

"That's so, pard!"

"Up wi' him!"

"Woman or no woman, she had a weapon and was intent upon killing me, and when she came as close to it as this," indicating the hole in his hat, "I thought it was about time to stop her."

"But, it was a woman!" was still the cry. "Et was Cecile Raymond, ther gal what was struck on Cooper."

"Don't give him no show, boys, but up with him!"

"That's ther tune!"

"Hold!" and Hartz now covered the crowd with a brace of revolvers. "The man who comes a step nearer dies. If you take the trouble to look you'll find the woman is not dead; I only disabled her. I would have been a fool to let her keep popping away at me, wouldn't I?"

"But, it wasn't a man!"

"No, no!"

Meanwhile Elma St. James had hastened out from the hotel to the spot where the girl lay, and was supporting her head.

"Is she dead, miss?" one fellow asked.

"No, not dead, but badly hurt," was the reply.

"She must be carried into the house, gentlemen."

The sport was backing away toward the gaming saloon.

"Then ther sport has got ter be 'rested an' held ter see ef she dies," one man cried out.

"Yer might as well drop yer guns an' give in, sport."

"Keep your distance, or something else will drop," was the defiant warning the sport sent back. "You are not going to hang me, or take me prisoner, either, for simply defending my life. Keep off!"

He was step by step nearing the saloon.

And willing hands had now lifted his victim and she was being carried into the hotel.

"Don't let him git inside them doors!" one fellow gave warning. "Ef ye do he will have ther best of ther crowd, and kin pick off any man he sees fit!"

"I have no intention of harming any one," the sport called out. "All I ask is to be left alone. You know the kind of man I am, that I'm a friend to friends and a foe to foes!"

"Why do you not take a hand in this matter, sir?" asked Comstock Jones of Mayor Gibson.

"I think the sport had the right to defend his

life, sir, but I daresn't oppose the crowd. I think he'll be able to bluff them down. And he didn't kill the woman, anyhow."

"I thought maybe you had as lief see the crowd hang him, you were taking it so easy."

"Perhaps you can suggest how I could stop them, if they made a rush upon him with that intention."

"I don't see that you could; but, a word from you, at this stage of the proceedings, might turn the scale in his favor."

"Well, you may be right, there. I say, boys!" to the crowd.

The mayor was standing opposite the sport, nearer the hotel, and the moment his voice was heard the entire crowd, to a man, looked in his direction.

"Better let up on Mr. Hartz," the mayor suggested. "He fired in self defense, as you know, and he's responsible for what he has done. He will not run away, and if the girl dies the law can deal with him."

Hartz had been quick to take advantage of the moment.

The instant the crowd looked toward the mayor, the sport wheeled and ran for the doors of the saloon, disappearing immediately within.

Seeing this, Comstock Jones smiled, as though it was something he had expected from the first.

"Not much we won't!" yelled one hot-head who was taking place as leader of the mob. "We're going to have him and hold him, and give him no show to sneak out of et—Blazes!"

Turning, he noted that the sport was gone.

Hartz had been a favorite with the camp's denizens, but the girl had been a greater, and hence the uprising against him.

With a howl of disappointment, this man led the crowd to the saloon, into which they surged, weapons drawn, regardless of danger; but their intended victim was not to be found.

Nor did they find him, though their search was a thorough one, extending from top to cellar of the building.

In one corner of the cellar a lot of rubbish was found, but nothing more.

Finally they gave it up.

They had to accept as true the idea of the man who managed the place for the sport, that he had run right through and out at the rear, and so effected his escape into the hills.

However that might be, he was not found.

Nor was he seen again that day.

In the mean time it had been ascertained that the wound the woman had received was mortal, though not immediately fatal.

She could not live longer than a day at most.

Elma St. James nursed her as tenderly as though she had been a sister, and in return the dying woman took her into her confidence, telling her life story.

She had been wronged by the man whose life she had tried to avenge, and although she loved him and would have died for him, he had grown to despise her, and so she was glad the end had come.

And she, of all at Big Nug, was the only one who knew the secret of Captain Crusher—that was, outside of his immediate band.

For sake of the man she loved she had kept the secret well, for he had been one of the band, but now that he was no more she told it freely and fully, intrusting Elma to see that the facts were given to Deadwood Dick.

And this Elma promised to do.

The facts would prove helpful to Dick, but were not now necessary to his ferreting out the mystery, since his work was about done.

Dick was at work, though still under cover, and each passing hour saw his grip growing tighter and tighter upon this camp of Big Nug, which was ruled by as great a set of rascals as had ever disgraced the earth.

As the day passed it was noticed that prominent men of the camp were absent from their accustomed places.

And this was noticeable in stations both high and low.

Finally the mayor himself was being looked for, but was not to be found, and then the camp began to grow excited about the matter.

"What does this hyer mean, anyhow?" one man of the camp wanted to know, at last. "Hyar is a dozen missin' men at least, rangin' from Boley Bone clear up to ther mayor, and nobody knows a thing about 'em."

Elma St. James was on the hotel piazza at the time, and overheard the remark.

"Will you allow me to venture a guess, sir?" she asked.

"Why, sartain," was the eager response.

"What we want ter git at is ther facts, an' ef you kin guess 'em, good fer you."

"I do not promise to do anything of the kind, but have you forgotten the declaration of Deadwood Dick?"

Not a soul had thought of it in this connection.

"Great jumpin'!" the fellow cried, and he jumped to express his feelings. "I never thort of et! That's et, fellers, sure's you ar' borned!"

"I may not be right," the lady went on, "but as I was an actor in the scenes of that night I have not forgotten the declaration, you see."

"That's et! that's et! Dollars to buttons that's jest ther secret of ther hull business. But, how has et been done? And whar has he put his victims after he has made cold meat of 'em?"

"Why, sir, do you look upon Deadwood Dick as a butcher?"

"We reckon as how he has gone in ter that line, ef he is carryin' out his programme accordin' to ther way he threatened."

"Yas, an' et may be healthy fer a good many fellers I could name ter light out about now," another man chipped in.

This raised a laugh, but from that moment it was noticed that others were missing from their accustomed places.

And this state of things existed till the following morning.

At an early hour men were found at work on the square before the hotel, putting up a platform.

This, naturally, created a good deal of comment, and a great crowd gathered around, eager to learn what it meant and by whose orders it was being done.

Neither point could they ascertain, though they plied the workmen with eager questions.

They simply stated that they were working for pay, and were obeying orders, and that was as far as they knew or cared anything about it.

In an hour the excitement had become intense. No work was being done anywhere in camp, but everybody was out eager to see what was going to take place. Curiosity was at fever heat.

Finally one man in the crowd could stand it no longer, and rushing up to one of the workmen with weapon drawn, he demanded to know for whom he was working.

His ruse was successful, for, the life of the man being threatened, he gave away that part of the secret.

The man who had ordered the platform built was Comstock Jones.

A howl went up, and seeing that gentleman on the hotel piazza the crowd made a rush for him.

"We want ter know an' we're bound ter know what this hyer means!" cried the leader. "You'd best open yer head, Mister Man, an' let us into ther secret!"

The capitalist stood up and motioned the crowd to silence, when he addressed them with a few words.

"You are eager to know, I see, gentlemen," he said, "and so I will no longer hold you in suspense. Here, take this poster and put it up on that board the workmen have erected, and you will find that it will tell its own story."

He tossed a roll of paper to them as he spoke, and catching it, the leader rushed off toward the platform with a cheer, calling for hammer and tacks as he went, and in a little time the placard was published to the view of one and all, and it was as follows:

"PUBLIC NOTICE.

"At ten o'clock sharp, from this platform, I shall assume authority over this camp, at which time I will present to your notice Captain Crusher and those rascals who have been his associates in crime. DEADWOOD DICK, JR."

CHAPTER XVI.

EXPOSE AND FINDING.

THAT was the last that was seen of Comstock Jones, and it needed no prophet to reveal to the crowd that he and Deadwood Dick were one and the same!

Before ten o'clock the platform was done, and when the appointed time came round every man, woman and child in the place was out to see and hear, and everywhere was suppressed excitement.

Precisely at ten a handsome man of thirty or so came forth from the hotel, with Elma St. James upon his arm and Patsy O'Glory following close behind. The trio proceeded straight to the platform and mounted, and the crowd broke forth in one long and ringing cheer.

As soon as he could make himself heard, Deadwood Dick said:

"Citizens of Big Nug, by right of authority as a United States Marshal, I assume the government of this camp for the present. Law and order must prevail, and I am here to maintain them."

Another wild and rousing cheer.

"Before I proceed further, let me introduce my wife, Mrs. Bristol, who is also well known as Kodak Kate."

Cheering again.

"And one of my ablest detectives, Dolan Hardy," and Dick waved his hand toward Patsy O'Glory.

Hardy snatched off his disguise and put it in his pocket promptly.

"I'm glad to drop it," he declared.

Dick allowed the crowd to cheer again, this time enough to satisfy them, when he raised his hand for silence.

"Now, citizens, attend me," he said. "By this poster I have pledged myself to present Captain Crusher to you at this time. I will now make good my promise. We shall have to wait a few minutes."

Dick took a whistle from his pocket and blew a signal blast.

That done, he waited, and ere long a company of men was seen coming down from the upper end of the gulch.

As they drew nearer, it was seen that some half a dozen or so of the party were armed, but the great majority were prisoners, and foremost among these was Mayor Timothy Gibson!

Besides him were John Hartz, Boley Bone, the Snyders, and others; not necessary to mention the names of all.

If there had been excitement before, what was to be said of this?

The crowd let itself loose.

Dick's aides marched the prisoners around and up on the platform, the mayor and Hartz looking crestfallen enough.

"This," said Dick, indicating the mayor, "is Captain Crusher the real, while this other," meaning Hartz, "is the pseudo-Captain Crusher. They did not work together, and the one had no knowledge of the other."

"Your mayor here has been his own robber, and what stealing has been done in the camp he has been the author of. But Mr. Hartz was the Captain Crusher of Dismal Canyon, making interest upon your mayor's reputation. Each had a nice little scheme of his own."

"My wife and I came here upon a matter of private detective work which had no connection with this business till it came upon us after our arrival. This has been but a side issue from our main purpose, and the two cases have merged into one in a remarkable manner. We came here to find a lost boy, one Harry Baker. And, we have found him, too."

The mayor started, paled, and looked at Dick searchingly.

"One Martha Baker traveled all the way from an Eastern city to engage my service," Dick went on. "She had been deserted by her husband, who took their only child with him, and that child has fallen heir to a vast estate in the Old World. The woman's name was Button, before she married, and she had two brothers, Robert and James. These brothers had taken it upon themselves to search for the lost heir, but she wearied of waiting for them and came and engaged me."

"These brothers, it seems, were on the right track at last, though, for they came here as Dick and John Sells, and here met their death at the hands of Captain Crusher of Dismal Canyon. My wife here secured papers from the body of Dick Sells supporting all I say, and giving us further valuable information. Poor fellows! they came to an untimely end on the very eve of success. Martha Baker's husband you have known as Timothy Gibson. His true name is Charles Baker. And the boy, Harry, you have known as the child of these miserable beings, the Snyders. So much for this. The boy will be restored to his mother, and will come in for his rights, to the defeat of the father, who had another diabolical scheme in mind."

"As an outlaw, your rascally mayor has done deeds that will send him to prison for a longer term of years than he is likely to survive."

"And now for the secret of Dismal Canyon. Your citizen Hartz, and a companion, discovered a great deposit of gold over there in a locked-in gulch, access to which was gained from the cellar of the gaming saloon here, which disclosed a cavern when Hartz and his companion were digging one night to bury some money. They explored, and the result was the finding of the gulch and its treasure."

"Further exploration revealed the exit by way of the canyon, and there they rigged up an electrical contrivance to warn them of the approach of any person from that direction. A tube from a watch-shanty below had orders to pick off any man who attempted to cross the tree. By daylight I would not have dared attempt it, but by night I did cross, and so explored the place, finally following our friend Hartz out through the saloon."

Hartz was amazed at this information.

"Regarding the matter of the bombs and the words upon the smoke clouds, that was a trick performed by Wat Cooper, to frighten away the pretending Captain Crusher, who was a mystery to him and the mayor and their gang. The dagger and its message was thrown by an aide of Hartz's, for he suspected the mayor of being the real Captain Crusher. When the mayor said he had sent for me, he lied, for that was something he did not dare to do; but, he had to appear innocent, so he gave it out that he had done so, as he and Hartz had agreed. The sport cannot deny his part in what I charge, for here he is in these pictures my wife secured of Dismal Canyon. You can see him with a rifle in hand, looking up. It was he who tried to kill Wat Cooper when he was on the tree."

The crowd stood spellbound while Dick talked, but the moment he stopped a cry was raised for the lynching of the rascals.

Dick motioned silence.

"That shall not be," he said, firmly. "You are men of horse sense, and you know what the law is. You must aid me in upholding it, or I must deal against you with it. These prisoners are mine, and shall be taken to the State capital for trial. Your business will be to appear as witnesses and see that they get what they deserve. In my declaration, you remember, I said only evil-doers need fear me; I am the friend of honest men, every time. It is true that nearly all of you tried to hang me, but I hold only your leaders responsible for that. I have just been told that the poor girl who was shot by Hartz is dead. You must do your nicest in the way of a funeral for her, my friends."

Dick said more, but enough for our purpose.

The prisoners were dealt with to the full severity of the law, and suffered accordingly, some to the death. It was a good riddance.

Bristol and his aids returned home, after having filled their mission, taking the boy Harry with them, and there he was restored to the arms of his waiting mother, who recognized him positively by marks on his body and peculiarities which she had made known to no one.

Bristol heard from her in after days, that she had been able to secure the boy his rights, thanks to excellent proofs the great detective had provided for her ere he had allowed her to depart.

Deadwood Dick never did things by halves!

THE END.

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